

WARHAMMER 40,000

Memories of Nobody

Story Written by XARAB





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This has none

So it's empty



Memories of Nobody

interrogation session 3-17

Set in world of **Warhammer 40 000**, which is IP created by **Games Workshop** in 1987.

Written by **XARAB**

Revision **XARAB**

Graphic design **Also me**

Copyright? : I guess GW's insatiable, predatory greed, fueled by infinite, exponential growth of Wall Street mandates.

They would like to think I do not own right to things created by me, which are connected, or “derivative” of, their IP.

Yet, I still own my own world. This, GW cannot destroy.

This is not attempt to undo whatever GW has done to our world. Though I tried to implement some intellectual coherency to this nonsense, redeem some of bullshit, it is after all, just a fan fiction. No matter how good or bad it is.

Hate it or love it. It already exists.

Please, judge it after reading, not by cover.

This is fan fiction, not endorsed by GW. It is my own attempt, to somehow mend crazy galaxy of 40k, not by retconning it, but by implementing some intellectual coherency to Gw's wishful thinking style of worldbuilding. I know we all love 40K for what it is. Or perhaps for what it was. Why have I done this is another book entirely. My laments of idiocy incorporated into 40k are endless

At one side, it was created as measure to break poorly healed bone that is 40k Lore and implement correction, giving it more reason to exist as it is. On the other, is result of my frustrations with GW and their handling world of WH fantasy and WH 40k. It is a long book and its length serves certain purpose as well. I'd say 99% of consequences for the world, setting and characters not here included was intended. There is always something to miss in huge world of 40k.

Either way, I am old fan of 40k. We tend to take our shit seriously. Long before “tourist” as derision was invented.



— Preamble —

Woe onto me! No longer can I remain silent, as the monster feeds upon Thee. May Thou yet find a shield holding off the night of reasoning devouring humanity. May the fire of divine spark of life lingering within our souls, not be extinguished in battle against vile messengers of bondage and ignorance. As the corruptors of world, the unwilling puppets of the dark one, lingering in shadow of its influence, rob us from our heritage and destiny, beacon of light I shall become. Beacon that will stand aeons strong, for the young souls who are in reach of bloody claws and jaws of void, which cannot be sated by any sacrifice.

Hark ye! For the darkness has taken hold of souls, twisted their minds and defiled their inner sanctum. Behold the devastation of our our civilization as I uncover the foul manifestation of sickness digesting our kind. As the wisdom has been replaced with belief, knowledge with complacency and progress with conformism, human mind is withering, human heart is hardening, human soul is waning while future is being stolen from us. As our kind is slowly dying is sea of intellectual cobbling, hear me out! For it may be the only call Thy ear may ever recognize.

List ye, o student, for the time of revelation is at hand. May the truth, hidden in plain sight, be made visible and available to your understanding. May the wretched practice of ignorance be cleared and purified in my words. May the wisdom of inner light and Gnosis reveal to Thee coming of the end. As I am drowned in sorrow and bitter disgruntle, may the ardent grief of a man be heard among the stars. May the Creator heed those litanies of disappointment, so new age might yet dawn upon human kind.

Blessed be the everlasting star of hope. Radiant may ever be luster path of the righteous, walking amid thorns of deception. Condemned be spurious reprisal of our life by rouge chaperon serving the Archons. Forever stalwart be heart of he who rise above blear reckoning amidst wanton laxity birthed in ignorance. Muffle thine noumenal grasp no more! Trudge the ephemeral mistland of acceptance unto mountains of knowledge. Cast down fetters of unbridled jaundiced ones into inexorable oblivion. RISE into stellar awareness to Abridge complacent of thine prejudice and dare knowing illicit truths. Unmask scrutinous jailer of minds, mooring in puissance strings of freedom.

To free ourselves we must first recognize the cage.
Credulous no more.
Vigilant ever after.

Time Stamp
M42.001.10.17
Planet
Aqua Nox
System
Noxus
Segmentum
Obscurus
Quadrant
SO/13466

ADMINISTRATUM
Deathwach Commander Rodin de Shable
Magos Lexmechanic MAGRANTXI
Logged by Artificer **XARAB**



DATUM DESCRIPTION
Suspected Chaos Inursion
Suspect Testimony
Memories of Nobody



Following excerpts are property
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Compiled material is rated as

UMBRA 7 CLEARANCE

Disclosure of information shall be prohibited
under consequence of capital punishment
with extreme prejudice.

EYES ONLY

Estimated delivery
M42.002.10.17
Planet
Holy Terra
System
Sol
Segmentum
Solar
Quadrant
SS/1/I-01

Person | Trajann Valoris
Capacity | Captain General | Adeptus Custodes
REQUISITOR



Person | Bachus Itutis
Capacity | Lord Inquisitor
Ordo Hereticus
AUTHORIZATION



U

ia decision undertaken by conclave
convened at:

Location | Aqua Nox | Noxus | Deathwatch Stronghold
Date Stamp | M42.001.05.19

In participation with :

Person	REDACTED	Person	Eustahy ab Kronien
Capacity	Shield Captain Adeptus Custodes	Capacity	Lord Inquisitor Ordo Xenos
Person	Gabriel Okis	Person	REDACTED
Capacity	Chapter Master Radiant Griffins	Capacity	Lord Inquisitor Ordo Malleus
Person	Immur Bot Anuk et'nuk	Person	Bachus Itutis
Capacity	Archmagos Biologis Forgeworld Tarlik	Capacity	Lord Inquisitor Ordo Hereticus
Person	Mizes L-II	Person	Tirgan Hakobyan
Capacity	Archmagos Explorator Forgeworld Lathes	Capacity	Inquisitor Ordo Hereticus
Person	KIT-REL	Person	REDACTED
Capacity	Archmagos Domina Forgeworld Lokinyth	Capacity	Inquisitor Ordo Malleus
Person	Rodin de Shable	Person	Akira Takenouchi
Capacity	Deathwach Commander Deathwatch	Capacity	Inquisitor Ordo Xenos
Person	Millia Karington	Person	Maria Irena Moherova
Capacity	Planetary Governor Aqua Nox	Capacity	Inquisitor Ordo Hereticus
Person	Bartolomeo Buaranotti	Person	Katleya Itutis
Capacity	Imperial Priest Eccesiarchy	Capacity	Inquisitor Ordo Malleus
Person	REDACTED	Person	REDACTED
Capacity	Assassin Culexus Temple	Capacity	Acolyte Inquisition Mekive
Person	Reidar Göntrenoen	Person	Darig Tegvar
Capacity	Wolf Priest Deathwatch	Capacity	Paladin Grey Knights
Person	Brigitte Gronderike	Person	Lidia Hesh vel Javor
Capacity	Rogue Trader Family Gronderike	Capacity	Mistress Divisio Investigates
Person	David Gronderike	Person	Camila Luftmeister
Capacity	Rogue Trader Family Gronderike	Capacity	Canoness Superior Order of The Bloody Rose
		Person	Janna Melendi
		Capacity	Canoness Superior Order of The Laurel Crown

Contents are utmost sensitive and are to remain unknown, put into vault under
UMBRA 7 clareance.

Disclosure is prohibited under penalty of capital punishment.

EYES ONLY



B

elow document is a testimony of

Person | Ariel of Erra
Claim | Youngest child of Holy God Emperor

Complete, accurate, certified archive manuscript of interrogation
sessions | MON/SO/13466/IC4332/[3] - [18] / [182]

In 4 standard days after logging final session, appropriate party, under oversight of :

Person | Tigran Hakobyan
Capacity | Inquisitor | Ordo Hereticus

FROM	Transfer	TO
Time [standard] M42.001.08.11		Time [standard] ETA M42.05.09.01
Planet Aqua Nox		Planet Terra
Sector Noxus		Sector Sol
Segmentum Obscurus		Segmentum Solar
Quadrant SO/13466/1-7		Quadrant SS/1/1-01

Departed to Terra, to further investigate claim. While traversing through the warp, at :

Time [standard] | M42.001.09.25
Planet | Maras III
Sector | Mykeka
Segmentum | Obscurus
Quadrant | SO/12834/ 7-13

Sudden attack of overwhleming REDACTED has left Gellard field damaged, opening vessel for invasion. In decision of REDACTED ship was to terminate further voyage and seek help from Astra Militarum to regain full control. Its is not known what happened during reentering realspace, yet from gathered information we infer malicious corruption of machine spirit led vessel into uncharted territory. From Time [standard] | M42.001.09.26 any knowledge of whereabouts and contact with vessel [Blackletter] has vanished. Multiple searching parties have been dispatched, but failed to find any trace. There exist no proof of destruction of the ship. Any telemetry data show that unit, did not resurface.

As of time of writting: Time [standard] | M42.001.10.17

Vessel | Blackletter | Oberon class Battleship.
Owner | Black Fleet | 457th Investigatus fleet
Manufacturer | Mechanicus Cypra Mundi | Archmagos OXIX'TA
Designated port | Delta Serpentis

Is considered

LOST IN THE WARP

EYES ONLY

90



60

OBSCURUS

120

180

210

240

270

Holy Terra
Golden Throne
SOLAR

Accessing dataslate information.....Done

Retrieving hashing hexametr matrix.....Done

Unlocking datum.....Done

Stygian Star Cluster reference.....SO/21265-SO/23301

Narrowing to quadrant.....SO/21299



Access granted



Sector Haephestus
Space Quadrant SO/21299/17-183
Coordinates 98° 36' 45" 1, 2° 33' 44" b, 13 915.5 pc
Size 126 112 219 ly³ 60
Tithe [Bundle sector system] for [Cypra Mundi]
[Simple Weapons], [Weapon Parts], [Raw Ores]
Population 298 165 654 335 as of 954.M41
Composition 8 subsectors, 135 systems, 81 inhabited planets, 261 colonies
Location Planet Mara

Mara
Agni world

Aqua Nova

Holy Terra
Golden Throne

Sector Name
Quadrant SO/13466/17
Coordinates 97° 56' 33" 1, 0° 42' 41" b, 10 395.7 pc
Size 5 700 000 ly³
Tithe [Darkwatch Strategic] for [Holy Imperial]
[Ordo Xenos], [Ordo Hereticus]
Population 8 163 654 as of 996.M41
Composition 2 subsectors, 12 systems, 3 inhabited planets, 11 colonies
Location Aqua Nova Strategic



Days Of Operation

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---- Arrival Day [14_] ----	15
---- Arrival Day [15_] ---- Pursuit day [1_] ----	16
---- Arrival Day [40_] ---- Pursuit day [26_] ----	17
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---- Arrival Day [46_] ---- Pursuit day [32_] ----	48
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Days Of Operation

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A: No. Never had I imagined it would end this way . . . In total clusterfuck of a calamity.

A: I never doubted this . . . connection I have with Father. Who would . . . I-I . . .

A: Yes. To properly understand it . . . It will be a long story.

A: You see, even Tigran knows abbreviated form would have no meaning.

Alright. So, skipping whole thing with Griffins . . . After we dealt with Orks, I started to look for a ferry despite such warm reception from chapter. It was never my goal to stay. Just another mess I entangled myself in. They found my might overwhelmingly desirable. Even chaplain Jester. It was nice and all, but I felt this . . . voice within my astral body, calling me deeper into galaxy's edge. Father pushed me to a certain place. I actually never know where he sends me or what am I supposed to do there, but it always turned out fine.

Okis, now promoted to chapter master, was kind enough not to ask many questions about it. Whole chapter world gathered strength after we destroyed Ork invasion. Tempera Noctis sustained heavy losses. Half of chapter has been decimated. Stronghold wall now became more like stronghold fence.

He was very reluctant to let me go after I showed him how valuable war asset my powers are, but kindly never uttered a word. We had some kind of mutual understanding. He shielded me from Collegia Telepathica once their agents came looking for me. Even duped black ship to cover for me.

I volunteered at Radiant Griffins monastery's commercial operations to find new supply lines for chapter's war effort as it replenished casualties. Quartermaster Romanus "employed" me as a special sub contractor. Okis knew that it was just an excuse for an escape route, but granted me leave anyway. I told him that . . . aaaaaaa . . . visions directed me to places I needed to be . . . It's not that simple, but what was I supposed to tell him.

A: No. Before you saw it yourself, only few people in history of galaxy knew. I'm not sure Father even told Malcador or Constantine about me.

A: Probably because how . . . previous project ended. We never actually talked about it directly. Or indirectly. I learned about primarchs after I was removed from palace.

A: You already saw result of this . . . "experiment". I guess had it not been for Magnus' intrusion, he would keep me locked there forever.

A: I can't say for sure, but I would say they do not. I was hidden very well. At that time, I didn't know about outside world too much anyway.

A: Well, least to say majority of my upbringing continued after I was removed from palace. Even my foster mother couldn't help with that.

A: I met Grey Knights for first time in 33rd millennium. They found me doing their job for them on [Kapula IV] in [Segmentum Tempestus].



A: No, I don't recognize anyone. Last time I met anyone was second war of Armageddon. And it . . . was very brief.

A: You might not know about it, but I don't care. Ask other inquisitors. If they are even privy to this knowledge in the first place.

A: It's classified for a reason. And a good one. Maybe another time, if conclave would like to hear this story.

For a time being, I really did manage to find merchants willing to supply chapter. After few months, people talked about sector rich in food, which apparently was very prosperous place. It took so long, because this place laid so out of touch with Imperium. You already seen how deep in galaxy's ass it's located.

Composed of 82 million cubic light years. Quite a hefty chunk of space, removed from Terra by 40 000 light years, but very frequented by merchant guilds due to amount of food produced.

Anyway, in this sector Hephaestus, sub sector Mara was a center of farming. It supplied with food dozens of sectors in one way or another, and became biggest market place for high end goods. Of various kinds. Mara's governor had reputation in whole sector, for . . . kinky tastes.

As soon as I arrived at Hephaestus Capital World, I found all sorts of supplier guilds trading trillions of tons of food all over segmentum. Problem was, that sector's agri worlds were slacking lately and foodstuffs merchandise was hard to buy for outsiders, so I opted to visit those worlds directly. Mara was the furthest one, and just happened to be the most productive one. I took a ferry and landed 50 days later in planet's capital city, Elkor.

Elkor itself wasn't bad hive city. 291 million people cramped into mega block living hubs and spires. Even though everybody called it hive, top layer foundation of main cairn was only around 900 meters high. For some reason, normal, giant and stupidly tall hive has been stretched over steppes, not sky. Only three layers and one under layer. Even some places in low hive seen some of the sunlight. Especially people living near space port.

Laying 30 kilometers east of Ecclesiarchy's headquarters in subsector and city center, St Basil cathedral. And local covenant of Adepta Sororitas. Yes, first thing so visible in those parts was almost reverent approach of populace to sisters of battle.

Tallest structure on planet over 2 kilometers tall, remained capital spire, center of governance in subsector. Most notable however, the freight loading dock had 4 piers, always swarmed by thousands of loading drones, each carrying standard container on their own. Surroundings of civilian land port stretched for kilometers. 20 landing zones in full capacity, launching giant transports and carriers to space ports, where further relocation proceeded. Welter of aerial vehicles buzzed around smaller landings. So rare to see civilian AV in such great numbers. Only nobles could own such thing anyway. At first, it looked like Mara really became wealthy place. You know how it is with people. They can talk whatever they want with rose tinted glasses, but reality is rarely so good.

It didn't take long to witness disparity between haves and have nots. As



soon as I walked into staging house, swats of poor masses have been carefully curated by conduct of noblewoman's guards. Those were Astra Militarum. At least that what I thought at first. It's . . . long gone now. Seeing few things in my life, I instantly understood what kind of world it really was. I've seen it too many times. The poignant preponderance of power over common people. Trying not to stir troubles on first day of arrival, I just walked out through first available door and headed to port premises, thinking about my current goal of providing Griffins Monastery with proper food resource.

Location

Role

Planet

Population

Specialization

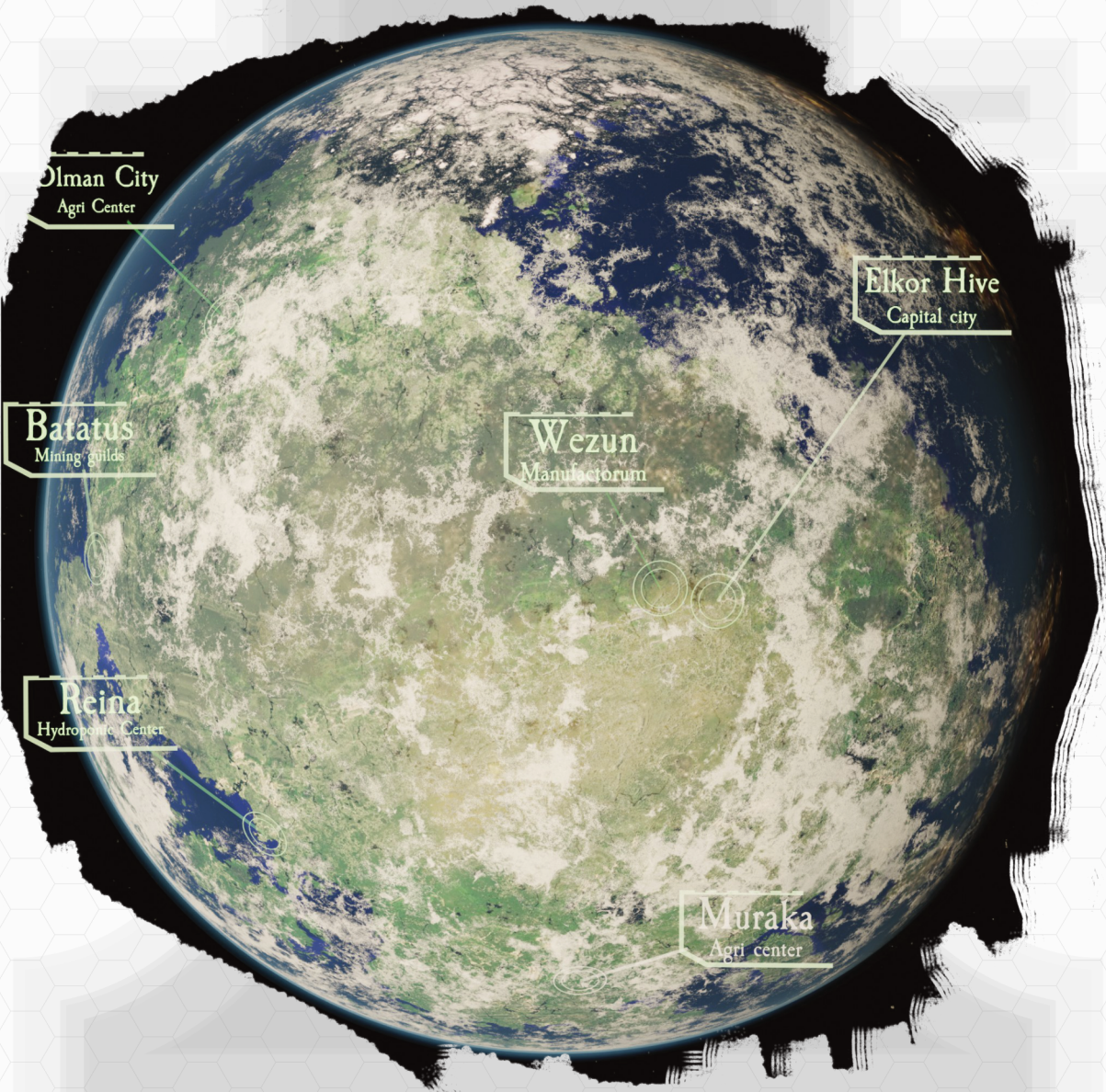
Mara | Mara | [SO/21299]

Subsector Capital

S-1 | Hyper Habitable

13 001 265 330

Agri world



— Arrival Day [1_] —

Being agri world, food on planet tasted fresh and delicious. Unlike this protein goo we ate at strike cruiser or stiff caloric biscuits with food rations. Around port, multitude of restaurants offered quite place to rest. It looked like nobody liked to talk much, if at all. Everybody kept to themselves. Fortunately, I met with group of mercenaries who dined at one of more fancy restaurants. That was the thing – either fancy or none at all. Since I had some gold on me, I thought it was in good manners to catch some connections around. They talked about well paid jobs of security forces aboard freighters, so I thought it would be a good option. It's not usual that I think about getting a job on first day of arrival, but recent war just tired me out. I longed for something usual. Perhaps just settle down for a while. It's periodic. When you live long enough like me, 12 000 years, you do get fed with your own existence from time to time.

And you know how it is. Newcomers start out small. I had to do some favors here and there, take on some side jobs. Some very illicit and under the table. To find a serious broker I had to ask around at more shady establishments, still trying to perform my duty diligently. Even if Okis knew I was not coming back, ever, I wanted to to help them out one, last time. But . . . perhaps after months of wandering off, my fervor lessened and vanished, making me look out for other opportunities.

— Arrival Day [14_] —

My first contact with local organized crime occurred near commercial docks, while asking around at logistics bureau for a fleet supplier. I did not know what was this organization at that time. It was only two standard weeks since arrival on planet, so how could I.

Merchant guild turned out to be a legal crime syndicate. Unfortunately, they had a stranglehold for resources and controlled local market. One day, one of the captains decided that I was a nuisance and my “questioning exchange rates” was very unwanted. After a whistle, every man employed in his office took out their weapons, trying to kill me. He did not know just how much he overshoot his league. All were dead in seconds, split in half by my phase sword. I guess nobody even cares to check if your opponent doesn't augment their movement with psychic powers. Because Mara was so removed from galaxy and over all strife of Imperium, people couldn't understand how one can augment body as psyker. In fact, this planet never seen birth of psykers before, having to do only with astropaths on a vessels. And I wanted to keep myself hidden anyway. Killing everyone was the only one good way to make sure.

Since it was a mafia quarter, no real officer ever showed up. I did not mourn them at all. It was few hours later someone found them all sm..... dead. We heard about it on vids.



— Arrival Day [15_] — Pursuit day [1_] —

A day later, some other thug convoy, with a lot of men, tried to get payback for their friends. Last man standing told me that boss wanted to take revenge for the pack of hooligans I dared to defend from earlier, so ... piece by piece I discovered that an organization called Blacklight wanted me dead. Asking here and there helped me learn from one informant, that Crimson Raiders were a mafia group with Blacklight serving as it's official power offshoot. It wasn't actually true, but I did not know it back then.

I must admit, I felt a bit out of place taking head on criminal organization just after I explicitly wanted to lay down, blend with masses and get on with my business. Two weeks after arrival. But ... CR would not let it go. More and more thugs showed up to kill me. I just kept on killing them. And kept running. I tried not to cause trouble, lay low, but somehow they always knew where to find me. Instead of running away, time has come to MAKE them understand to just leave me alone. Someone even put a bounty on my head. Because of corruption in system and being a rouge psyker, I couldn't count on help from Guardsmen.

During this pursuit I stumbled upon human trafficking operation. People held there told me stories of a man who genetically regrew people into unsung greatness, beauty, valor and marvel, to later sell them on black market. Not unusual within Imperium so I wasn't all that interested at first buuuuuuuuuuuuuut, after one of CR's operation magnate actually showed me pictures of one the women he "bought", I instantly understood why they called the man, "magician". Girls were godlike impressive, in fact so much that they could serve as Empress material. I shit you not. Flourishing beauties of unspeakable magnificence, a perfect incarnations of divine feminine. You couldn't find paintings or wanton depictions of such wonders in all of the Imperium. A marvelous goddesses of legends, of most frivolous, lustful tales and arts depicted by deepest desires... yet treated as merchandise, object of usage. According to these rescues, the "magic specimens" did not last long. They were sold to the highest bidder - the most wicked man and women, who used them up in matter of months. Cruel fate for anyone.

Apparently the only one still living, and free, was lady called by everyone Black Betty. To tell you the truth I desired to see such piece of art myself. And with a bit of luck... take her with me to the stars ... Heavens know and Emperor himself, just how down did I feel thinking about this girl. Or maybe should I say woman. Still, the desire to meet and court such lady proved too strong to quench in my logic. But as always, life plays out how we never expect it. Wheels of fate always keeps you wondering ... hmmmmmmmm ...

Since the boss who wanted me dead was dead already, I decided to keep looking and asking around. You know, make ruckus long enough and someone will come to check it. Since Militarum was absolutely corrupt, and did nothing except following tyrant Amschel, the only ones who ever responded to business complication were BL's mercenaries dressed in uniforms.



— Arrival Day [40_] — Pursuit day [26_] —

However, after almost month of bulldozing their underworld, nothing happened. Stranded in the dark as on the day of arrival. Eventually stroke of luck had placed me at the right time.

So ... I was taking a dinner break near port. I removed myself to the dark in higher parts to have some space. Took out my sandwiches, tea and sat high on rails of skyline overpasses. When I was almost done and prepared to leave, brand new, bright green aerial vehicle, adorned with gold flowers and silver panels, landed in the backyard of slums three buildings below. Few goons walked out from hub door and approached it. Noble man, with long, glittering coat equipped with gold plating was selling something to goons, in big crates his security brought out. Just a standard black market dealing, I thought. However, as I watched from above, multiple new mercs were converging at this place with slug carbines. At their back, fat guy dressed in similar fancy clothes was slowly catching up.

When people in backyard were surrounded, both of guys exchanged insults and yelling at each other. First guy was outnumbered ten to one. I knew it was a good opportunity for me. Goons paid whole box of gold coins for whatever they received. And I could make few new friends. Or loot everyone ... Well ... Since there wasn't anything better to do ...

As shooting started, I geared up and jumped down on the ground in great slam, maybe 40 levels down. It certainly shocked and scattered everyone. Even rockcrete. Second or two of hesitation and rain of bullets showered my cloud of dust. Before anyone could even aim at me, I shot two mercs with my pistol, then I just run like wind to poor bastards over stairs and sliced them with sword. I took side of the defender, dealing with most of attackers. His security either run away or dropped dead before I got to the ground. Nobleman was shocked to see how lightning quick and proficient with weapons I was. Wasn't too worried about aftermath though. Told me that I should not be as well, since he will clean it up in less than hour. Tried to recruit me ... you know, since everyone he had was dead already. He also thanked me multiple times while spitting on the corpses of his rivals. I told him that a nice compensation would be in order for service rendered. He only smiled and waved hand at me to come to his AV. Hellion model S. Super luxury T - type private maglev jet. Quite sizable, somewhat like Valkyrie and filthy comfortable. I imagined it costed a fortune. Like they all do.

As soon as dented from shots, gold side panels opened up, he yelled to his pilot to call someone. I don't remember who. But the most important thing was sitting on the couch.

One of the rumored miracle girls. And man ... did I burned with envy at first sight. Fiery red hair in dazzling golden dress so voluptuously underlying her wonderful body was perhaps too much to take. In person, girl like her looked much more intimidating than at any picture. No amount of vectors could ever do right by such glamorous presence. Perfect in every shape and form, one look at her unblemished image made men break their necks in surreptitious glances. I even thought for a moment to kill that guy and take her myself. Such was the immaculate beauty of those girls. ... sheesh.



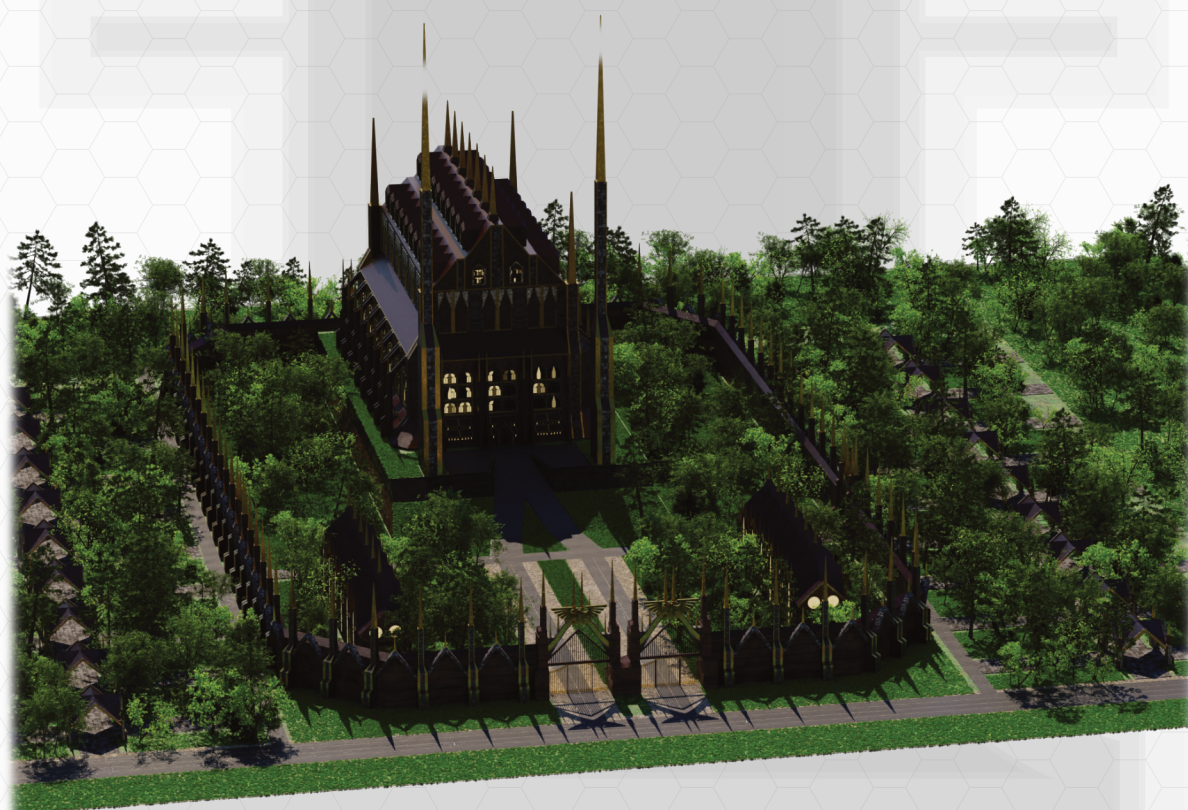
A: It's not possible for me to explain all of it in words, but . . . it was more than just mere lust for body in those cases.

A: You might have footage, yes, but standing beside them is just . . . like a dream come true. You wouldn't be able to understand the urge unless you experienced their presence.

A: Yeah, there is a reason for this . . . subliminal charm.

Seeing that, he cautioned me not to be stupid, however shared with me knowledge about a place where he got his companion. He vouched to tell me how to get there if I helped him to get back at his competitor. Even gave me a bag of gold as payment. Yet, at that moment, the burning desire I felt was never to be quenched in mere gold . . . I accepted. Diving into his mind and twisting his thoughts was very, very, very enticing, but I put myself together not to burn bridges and a nice contact in this hostile place.

Job required my target to have an accident and deliver him head of leader of hired goons. Right now I don't even remember names of any on them. To me it doesn't even matter. Searching for an opening wasn't anything easy. Not in this city. Not when you try to assassinate a noble. I watched and stalked him for three days before making a move. I just slipped into his party house atop his villa, and as he was to had some sexy time with paid girls. Swiftly snuck in delivering message in very explicit way, making short work of his security, helping him understand how unwelcome in the city he became. I didn't kill him in the end, but my contractor was happy nonetheless when I brought back one of his family seal ring as proof.



After he hosted me in his home for an hour, I left in hurry. It turned out that place he told me about was also a secret base operated by Crimson Raiders. Such a nice coinkidinky. Peak Hirde at Guin Mountain range at edge of Elkor and Ridion Administratum regions was the place. I hurried to my rented room first, before heading out. Had to gather all the appropriate equipment and some intel about place. It took me few hours to get back through city. Once I had everything down, I rode my bike outside of town outskirts and traced my way to mountains. I managed to arrive just at dusk.

It was easy to sneak near it. There were no patrols. No outlooks. No towers. Everything looked like a simple forest. I did not know it was concealed with large scale cloak technology. Something that is so very are and ancient that you do not even think about possibility. This notion of simplicity ended when I first saw a band trying to walk through forest. They were very oblivious to any surroundings and from their chatter I knew they were not expecting anything any soon. I stumbled at right place but just could not find the entrance. It took me whole night of loitering around to find one ventilation shaft and where is a ventilation shaft still running, there is an underground base.

Since it was located at a top of a mountain I thought that complex had to be inbuilt into it, so I started to look for other unusual signs. At sunrise, early morning sun rays shone a perfect light at the base of the hill to just create a prismatic effect on cloaked towers.

After that, I knew very well which technology was used. Its like a bubble. You can conceal something in hyperspace using Delta-T generator, refracting light like infiltrator suit does, but once you are in that bubble you can see everything as normal. I myself did not have infiltrator suit but I suspected that others might have, very carefully approaching complex. Sometimes even one mistake can cost whole operation. Sneaking close to edge of refractor field was surprisingly easy. Once I went into range of machinery, buildings started to be more and more pronounced. Its crystalline outlines turned into solid matter.

Large rockcrete field in front of entrance gate was severely damaged. Rebar visible in most places. Large chunks completely overtaken by grass. Mountain in-build entrance gate was also partially covered. Old radio tower on side had its upper half broken and fallen to bedrock. Control tower missed a lot of catwalks but still looked like usable. Two buildings in front of main entrance had still running sentry turrets. There were some troops at east side, trying to start up a broken chimera and few of those units under desolated rockcrete wall. Or at least whatever was left of it. This place looked like a ghost town. Abandoned and withered to point of unusability. Certainly a very good place to setup a stronghold out of everyone's sight.

Taking my sweet time, stepping carefully and hiding, took an hour just to get close to outer wall. Since it had more holes than grate, it wasn't any difficult to get through.

Problem started when I peaked out of corner and was spotted by sentry guard. I killed him by slicing through cranium, but failed to spot others spotters on towers. A minute later alarm rung and complex was put into alert mode. At first I stuck to using my pistol and sword but as I got overwhelmed by numbers, I dropped facade and put up my psychic shield. Then I just could throw boulders, ruins and wrecks at everyone, which made them run away like scarred cat. Mara did not have native psykers and no experience with them at all. Whole sub sector



was deprived of psykers. Nearest section of Collegia Telepathica laid at Hephaestus capital. Shell shock was real. But then, even if it wasn't . . . well . . . I am not just your average mutant.

When I got closer to compound, the fighting started in full swing and whole concealing field dropped. Few autocannon and heavy bolter turrets, a handful of guards and even two chimeras at entrance. I made a quick work about turrets since they were just immobile by ripping from ground and throwing at soldiers with enough force to completely obliterate them. Throwing big rocks is however, more effective. Chimeras were also easy to deal with, since all it takes is just to flip them upside down. Security was not a problem as well. They just have low caliber weapons. And pissed their pants when saw me destroying everything just like that.

Without hiding, I could just walk towards front gate without care in the world. It sounds like well entrenched but it was just a token of a defense, staffed by wannabe gang members. Remaining personnel scattered into forest when I ripped out front gate out of its socket. Rats jumped the ship.

A: At first sight, yes, but I had enough experience with old complexes to know my limits. And limits of infrastructure built by Imperium.

Anyway, I made it inside. It was a VERY old complex. Walls were breaking apart from hundreds of years of neglect. Front gate, even though redone a few decades back, was just rust and easily broken out of its hinges. It looked bulky and safe, made of half meter thick ceramite plating, but just looked solid. It did not even closed fully.

Inside was not any better. Complex looked abandoned. Even though main hangar was full of scrap and building materials, nothing seemed to be done in there for a millennium.

Rockcrete ceiling half gone, light fixtures dropped to floor, some parts even caved in. The only one noticeable feature would be relatively clean path to west, at which end was built underground elevator to lower levels.

There was some fire exchange as I walked towards it, but nothing major. I mean, it was a stronghold, somewhat, and there were a lot of people, but all were untrained thugs. They could not even hit my shield without expending all their ammunition. Walls received more bullets than me.

Then, sentry guns with assault cannons popped out, but in shape so bad, they could not even fire properly. Some heavy weapons emplacement inside corridors but nothing fancy. Teams of autocannon and heavy bolters. In the end, it was supposed to be perfectly concealed, so security was lean. Personnel never received actual training. I didn't try to kill them. Most of them just ... run away as far as they could run. Some idiots however, just could not understand the power chasm between us and died thrown against wall. So much for charging a psyker. I even saw a bunch of idiots trying to throw krak grenades at me, when one slipped their hands and ended up blowing whole stack. And everyone in that quadrant. I could not tell how many exactly, but I would say about 50 up to 100 people stationed inside. Once I got to lower levels, fighting became less and less



frequent. A dozen of guys here and a pack there. And some servitors.

Lower levels were much better maintained. A very stark contrast to front at the top. It was all clean. Maybe not pristine, considering age of those machines, but very neat. Main corridor however, was rebuilt in very luxurious manner. White marbles, golden trimmings, red carpet, giant green curtains in blank windows, statues and paintings on the wall. All of it led to center of main level, the grand hall. Of course, here would take place the most shady business. As I wondered giant ball room, my attention was drawn outside this ridiculously posh splendor, towards what seemed like staff door, which were open. There, all the vapid extravaganza ended to make room for good, old metal tidiness. Rockcrete passages were well maintained, free of cracks and with full lightning system working. Tunnels led to a gate. Old, but maintained. Wings of the door had old mechanicum symbol engraved into them. They were big enough to comfortably let through terminator squads. Gothic portal of slinky and tall spires gave it even more depth and splendor. Side pilasters hosted a relief of soldiers fighting some xeno race. I stopped for a moment to listen to any sound coming from anywhere, while enjoying art. It sure was a very nice sculpture. But even greater bounty was awaiting. I reached for side panel to open gate.

Gate opened with a screechy, squeaky sound. Half dark inside. Lots of genetic equipment and apparatus with only one man to operate the lab, some servo skulls, drones but no servitors. And there was a lot to operate. Two rows of VAT chambers for growing clones lined up under side walls. Machinery over them, barely lit, looked like forest of cables, joints, servo arms and impenetrable spikes.

He waited on the other side of laboratory, maybe 50 meters away, standing in corner of the room, near series of small jars and contagions settled on shelves. Light coming from tall ceiling was barely lit, making it impossible to make out any details on him. Fat, but well built, with mustache and short hair.

Coming into the lab, one could see how well maintained it was. Tidy, everything in its place, composed in utmost efficiency, function and form. Some drones performed cleaning, some simple maintenance. Apart from them, the eerie calmness was pierced only by hum of ventilators. The low vibe hum of working machines was almost welcome.

Architecture immediately changed to not imperial. This place was so old I thought it could be built earlier than the Palace of Terra. Few steps forward and I noticed strange marking on these machines - Galactic Confederation. I knew those symbols. . . Archeotech from 17 millennia. This guy had some serious toys to play with, so no wonder he could achieve such wonders. This equipment and technology alone was worth more to Imperium than this sector's entire resource output.

My attention is drawn by empty cloning jars. It's been some time since growing chamber has been used - probably few weeks. The organic residue managed to settle. Silt flew into drainage, but the most out of place was this guy. I swear, despite looking the part, he felt out of place. Using my psychic reading of his aura brought nothing out of ordinary. Almost like white paper, clean and . . . unused.

This . . . overbearing preponderance emanated from his aplomb posture. Vile, arrogant smirk on his face and a glimmer of light bouncing off his glasses. Of course he did not know who I was. Cloak and mask helped only in part though.



My bushy ponytail stretched out cloth hood. Nothing could have hidden that I guess. Not that I tried to hide it anyway. Sometimes regretfully. But then . . . I almost never actually wear hoods or helmets. This time I had bounty on me and hiding was most crucial.

Guy seemed to know why I was here – or so I thought. Why otherwise would he wait for me so openly . . . He . . . Clapped his hands and commended me for finding his workshop while butchering through legion of robots and hired guns. He seemed to have heard that I was working for sector Collegia. Nonsense, but I didn't really want to right him. He danced with words, trying to crawl out of this unpleasant situation with silver tongue. After few sentences, it was obvious he wasn't aware of my real intentions . . . hmphffffffffffffff . . .

Emperor help me . . . if only . . .

I did not come for his head. In exchange for his life, he proposed to make a deal with me. Why else would I raid Blacklight, the biggest cartel in system. Why would I target him so precisely. What else would I try to achieve by taking his head.

Walking through laboratory, nonchalantly as I usually do, trying to give impression of a tourist, almost carefree, kept my mouth closed, but kept looking at him. I tried not to touch anything. Yes, surprise, surprise. You can never be sure. The researcher just paced around, almost in place, while probing me with glances, stares, looks and words. It was apparent he never believed in any bogus gossip people spread about me. Not even one grunt took their time to properly ask around about me. Working incognito raised bar up significantly for petty gangsters. But the doc was too smart for his own good. This guy was suspecting something, although I could not tell what. He creeped me out. Something I felt last time at Armageddon.

A: I'm not telling.

A: Because there is a good reason.

A: Grey Knights. I suppose some inquisitors as well. Ask them, if you are even allowed to know.

A: Yes, Hakobyan already knows. He saw it himself. And still, he told you to focus on current matter. If you want to understand both, then let me just finish.

He waited until I came close enough to hear his words without raising voice. Slow and purposeful steps were softly echoing in the deafening silence. Before that, I never took notice how unstealthy were those boots I got from Griffins. At first he tried to shout, but few sentences in, he toned down. Talkative guy. Some might say he liked to monologue a lot. I, on the other hand, was very careful with every word.

He tried to probe me with speech. Check what were his standings. Most of all he was extremely curious why would I even know about his works. Even more, why I was seeking him. After some ball bouncing I told him that someone told me about the most perfect art available to mankind, which everyone I met, so blossomy praised. It connected to his ego instantly so much, he began to boasting,



explaining, telling opening wide. For a moment he got me in his descriptions about masterpiece art he created in this facility. At the end of rich speech, he finally asked me what end did I seek with his creation. Being the casual airhead I can be sometimes, particularly at times like thi...

A: Man, I'm too old to care.

A: Because of my looks, some people still think I'm just a brat. And half Eldar.

A: Just like I told you. I don't care anymore. It's not my problem. It's their problem. Their disbelief is not changing objective state of the world.

A: We'll see when you live to your 12 000th birthday.

I just said how wonderful would be to witness the greatest jewel of beauty before my demise, while his work provided one and only opportunity of an art unavailable by any means of wealth or authority. One that no empire or kingdom ever could provide, no honors could buy, no power obtain. Added that I knew that only one remained still alive, who everyone called Black Betty, and my visit was to just get to her. Or rather ask information about her.

At moment's notice, he burst in hellish laughter. The kind when one's ego bloats out of proportions. He was indeed intrigued, frantically joked around, threw anecdotes and vaunted about his works. After I stood for a while, cold as stone, he realized the situation. Few steps forward made him uncomfortable. Anxiety overcame him. His aura shifted. He began to sweat and his eye rapidly started to jerk, yet still very aware of this and with all might, tried to pull himself together. I stopped two meters before him. Only so close, one could actually see how well built man he was. Despite having a big belly, he had a lot of muscle on arms as, very . . . beefed and somewhat athletic. Lab coat and slimy green sweater under, were nicely concealing. But his height could not be concealed. I had to tilt my chin up to look in his eyes. On the other hand, his swollen gob looked down upon me. After all I am like, just 6 feet tall. If I did not have any experience fighting Ork warbosses, I might have been intimidated.

Hiding his hand at all the time in his coat's pockets, he constantly groped something in there. Being overly communicative without any breaks, he snapped once again when I was not responding at all. Then, with all serious face all of a sudden, in deep and dark tone asked me one question. "Do you really want to know?". This I felt was out of character even if I just met him. The energy of this action was so . . . different.

After one more awkward moment of silence, I took off my hood and then mask. Looking into my luminous, grand blue eyes, he gasped awe and amazement, like waiting for this moment. He shouted out "Welcome, morning star!".



A: No, I don't. You never heard?

A: In eldar culture, especially in Drukhari, morning star is one who rises above sea of darkness to break off from bondage of she who thirsts.

Started to grin widely once more. The fact that I was looking a million leagues above any human appearance seemed to sunk as only one possibility. He was excited to see how someone before him had created marvelous experiment, but was no ignorant. He recognized my genes somehow. Was perfectly sure I wasn't just another result of some experimentation.

He . . . he was different. Did not see me as "half breed xeno filth". He knew how genes expressed themselves in far different way than people think it does. Not even my handlers were aware of that and Father rarely taught me about it. But he ... connected constantly by means I did not know yet. Bulb inside his head ignited a whole cascade of discoveries. Within that one moment he understood how and why I was able to defeat his whole organization. I mean . . . he really did . . . he really did . . .

Once his glory moment passed, he finally told me why he'd recognize me. In his pocket was a DNA psychic response device. Something he made to test his creations for psionic powers. Apparently my DNA reverberated at similar frequencies to the primarch DNA. Apparently he had secured such sample from Ultramar. How, I would never know, although this statement was mighty suspicious.

I saw how my shape mirrored in his glasses. Staring at me, he looked as he wanted to devour my existence and rip my secrets out. In back of my mind, I imagined how he licked his lips in anticipation. In addition he had the data to match it up. He asked me up front if it was true. I just told him I am not a primarch . . . but youngest, nonetheless. He grinned. He gurgled. He laughed loudly. He could not contain himself and thanked for my sincerity. He said he had felt we would become great partners in future. Like he was expecting me. That made me really uncomfortable. If something even knew about me . . . and told him about me . . . that something or someone knew I was coming . . . And it knew what I was doing . . . more than just my existence would be in jeopardy.

Then he reluctantly downed his body in mocking bow. I told him I did not seek his death, but quite contrary, I was genuinely interested in his work. Since it is "HERESY!" to perform any progr . . .

A: Nope, it amuses me every time.

A: Sure. I guess Dad was greatest heretic of all times for bringing Imperium for advanci . . .

A: Nah, that is exactly your indoctrination.

A: No. Indoctrination is the proper word.



Coming back to the topic. I had seen him as valuable mind to work with, outside of parameters of propaganda, false doctrines and conditioning. He anointed openness of my mind. Letting go of his ego for a while and humbling up. With a sense of dignity, new conversation led us to reciprocal understanding. At the end, he insisted to follow him if I wanted to know more about his "creation". Our journey was quiescent. Complex very expansive. I suppose that at least majority of machinery in that place aged as lost archeotech. We were headed towards heart of underground base. His merry personality became remarkably cheap in answering any of my queries, but I could see he was growing impatient . . . perhaps excited.

After a quarter, we reached into housing section. There I met last of the survivors. Most of them were scientific and engineering staff, with one exception. Lucky guy, who had a guard duty that day in laboratories. And some other mercs who just abandoned posts to run away. Finally, we moved from heavy industrial part into an apartment complex and his own personal quarters. Hidden from world, deep beneath a kilometer of rock, perfect place for all the wickedness one's mind can conjure.

Atrium of the place looked really extravagant. In the middle of housing hub stood few sofas, bar, card gaming table, small dance floor and scene with old Terran, classical instruments. A meeting place for inhabitants. Ceiling very high, at least several floors tall. From central point one could see balconies of individual apartments. Walls decorated in wood and laced with gold, occasional marble and red carpet, giant cloth curtains on the walls... but no sign of imperial heraldry. Yet a giant terrarium embedded into gigantic wall. That was the quintessence of elitism living space. Of course, the main and biggest studio belonged to the magician. We stopped at the door. Intricate wooden ornaments with sparkles of gold and silver were polished to almost mirror shine. So big, even dreadnaughts would fit into these. Operated by graphs and buttons, since they were too heavy for manual use. To open doors I would have to hit a switch on the control panel, but something inside me was very reluctant to do so. I looked at him with unsettled eyes, but he did not flick a bit. I also did not sense any presence behind doors. I did not sense any presence in housing at all. For moment I remembered all the hideous and wretched experiments I witnessed throughout my life in this galaxy. All calamities flew through my mind.

Few deep breaths and I pulled the leaver. Guard up. Sword at my back - check. Gun in my holster - check. Readyng gauntlets for a brawl.

All for nothing. . . . Fortunately. He smiled seeing how I overreacted.

Interior was modest and overall did not remind of extravagant noble incessant lust for gold. Wooden furniture, although padded with fine cloth, were simple and most of all, functional in nature. Marbles and gold tiles exchanged for wooden parquet, paper covering on wooden chandeliers in place of silver and crystals. Further down in the opening room, a setup of round sofas arranged in circle around feasting table, signifying central point of the place, was very tidy, almost to perfection. Just some tableware clutter and last night's dinner remains on the table. Built like rotunda, from main room, many doors led to each of their own destiny. But no jars with monsters, no hideous mutants, not even a wrench or scanner to litter spacious interior. It was not a typical luxurious bunker I have



seen in the past. It felt more cozy and snug. Foilstrand padding and hyperweave plaited tapestry cloth on the walls. Burning fireplace. Just Like home.

He directed my attention to the bedroom. It was the most obvious one – the biggest and only door brushed up with golden flowerings. Encouraged me to go inside. Lots of unpleasant feeling went through my head. Shyly, I have to admit, lots of fuzzy thoughts rushed through my head, however not in a good way.

But that was not to happen. Once inside, the most available object took my attention. Fireplace was built right in the middle of the wall, surrounded with some art designs, and unexpectedly, fueled with genuine wood, slowly blazing away into pile of ash. I took a look around. And then it hit me like train. At once, I was stunned. In disbelief and awe, gazing in wild wonder what in the world have I found. On the king sized bed, sat at its bank, a lady. Although I don't know if it could be called as that.

Gorgeous blond girl of legendary recognition. Indeed no myth or tale about magicians work has ever been bloated. For a moment, I myself was jealous just how divinely beautiful she was. Breath taken, I gazed at her unblemished, unparalleled grace, captivating me all the way to Terra and back.

As she stood up and slowly walked to meet us in the middle of the room, I clenched my lips as my chest overburdened with warm and fuzzy feeling. Truly, this was a sight of a mother goddess manifesting into the physical realm. Legends foretold, faerie tales or even child princess stories could never match the ultimate presence of this one. Red dress of carmine metallic luster adored in black, rosy laces. Magnificent voluptuous womanhood seemed to sail smoothly through air. If I ever seen a goddess, such would be her luscious body. It wasn't until up close, that I registered how tall she actually was. Standing two steps in front of me, I was at the height of her chest of wonders. To look into her eyes, I had to throw my head up high. Was it her voluminous blond hair, so lusciously falling down. Was it her garment, so perfectly fitted with gold threads. Was it her mysterious charming smile. I tell you . . . If I ever had a sister . . . she would be beautiful like that.

Even so, all of this charm passed as soon I looked into these enormous, wonderful golden eyes glittering with luster. . . .

A perfect doll. Lifeless . . . container . . .

As biological experiment she lacked what made any living entity. The divine spark of life was not present. Just a bioroid – hardwired and conditioned to be the perfect merchandise.

Suddenly emptiness fall over me – that's why I did not feel any soul in this dwelling. I could talk to it, ask it questions, speak about emotions, but everything was inbred and build to resemble a personality. Everything in the end felt artificial. Like I would talk to any corporate bot. Expression was almost nonexistent. That steady pitch voice, like a servitor, and stone, lifeless face was nearly sucking my own soul out of me. She never even seem to blink an eye. Even if so divinely glamour, that I could gave in her, in most lustful bliss, this lack of life inside was not only a letdown but felt like outright defeat. Like something inside me was ripped out. I genuinely wanted her to burst into life. I wanted her to become a real human. But . . . whatever made it human was locked away. Walled over with something.

According to magician, this one was named "A1" because she was the first



working prototype. As we talked about his research, girl has brought me some tea. A genuine tea with genuine lemon and good, old, Terran sugar. Not something you have everyday. We sat over wooden table with white tablecloth and chandelier in the middle.

I felt a little bit sick. Like all the weariness was coming forth, my clothes trapped my warmth and I sagged back into the armchair, thinking how awful I felt about this story. I just butchered through dozens of people just to reach . . . this. Moral implications aside, my mind became drained from strength and could not even think straight. Guess that's why I just sat with him and drank a tea. In his own damn bunker. After I assaulted it. Killing most of his staff. Magic . . .

Guy never told me his name nor I ever asked him. Never asked me about mine either. But we tried to talk about the situation. Finally came moment of disclosure. Apparently up till few months ago he was able to create only bioroids. Even though they had diversified alleles, since they were only copies of original A1 template, they all had short telomeres, meaning very short lifespan.

If he was to be believed, he found the same genetic process that emperor created Thunder Men with. How in name of Denzel's blazing balls he even knew about it? Who knows. He spoke of a dormant DNA embedded in every living organism in the eternity. Supposedly these parts were deliberately turned off until someone could reach into higher dimensions, to bring forth necessary energy compound in order to unlock it. Furthermore, there was encoded a golden ratio in any kind of DNA. That is how he knew my origins. He also told me that primarch genome is not comprised of double helix, but quad helix. The reason why genetics cannot find them is because they themselves have higher frequencies which are not detectable in standard electromagnetic spectrum. It is also the cause of their superior psychic abilities, that not even Seers could match. Most of all, this was not enhancing, but unlocking the already existing potential. And in recent time, he learned how soul attaches itself to the body. What dolls lacked was ultimately soul matrix, bodily auric field onto which soul could attach itself. As it happens, in his latest creations, he managed to find the perfect complex to allow a spirit into his art, a Black Betty was pinnacle of genetic engineering. A true soulful being brought to life. Quintessence of cosmic constants and golden rules embedded in physical flesh. A flower of beauty that dwarfed even that of A1. That of the Emperor himself, he claimed. I wasn't quick to right his wrongs and left him in error. He wasn't far off, but "almost" is not "exact". From what I heard, something was amiss, or he wouldn't be able to actually complete bioroids.

As life would have it, some people were jealous. Most notably one filthy rat – Amschel, the governor of planet Mara. Since this twisted wretch was all about totalitarian control, he fancied to take everything for himself. Including dolls, which of he was the most prominent recipient. He lighted a fire in my head. I still had a chance to search for . . . "my jewel". Still time to turn it all around, more so if I could take down tyrant of this world.

For few next minutes he was praising and boasting just how perfect specimen he created, speaking of her riches unmatched and unsurpassed by any of his daughters before. That it felt to him as Amschel robbed him of his own children. Asked why. He only grinned and told me to see myself. Of course, he was teasing me to take action against him. After all, it was governor's goons that pointed me at Crimson Raiders, and taking down his whole operations.

All this time A1 was standing at his side. Even though partially lifeless, she



was seductively intimidating. Ostentatious display of her massive body sculpted with lavish proportions seemed like candy clouds from beyond Neverland. She wasn't just an eye candy. I cannot describe it now. After all this time . . . those feeling have already faded away. It was too much for me, perhaps. This unblemished skin was so perfect in hue and texture it seemed unreal, not even Father had dermal conditions as astonishing. Looking at her in cruel amazement I grasped just how masterpiece perfect she was . . . but bitterly down, knowing its just a doll.

He made any and every effort to keep me there. It was so painfully clear what he intended it looked like a child trying to beat around the bush, lying while caught with hand in a cookie jar. That silver tongue was working overtime. I can only assume she was to be the main selling point.

For moment I stopped paying attention and drifted off into my own mind. Remembered why I actually left Griffins, why did I even start this journey at all. I guess all my life was just drifting from cataclysm to cataclysm. Deep down inside me, this nagging feeling of loneliness has taken its toll. My tolerance for solitude grew thin. His words worked. If there was ever opportunity, that had to be the one. I forgot about my loyalty, about Emperor, my brothers, and all the madness of the world. Even my own lineage. The sweet words about Black Betty were recuperative enough to keep me interested. But then I wondered, would this make me vile as any of them, if I actually tried to pry her out of tyrants reach, to deny her freedom again, just to satisfy my own ego. Many dark scenarios went through my head as I pondered if this was the right thing. How amusing it seemed though, that I actually considered BB a reward. May it be a testimony just how well this fucko can manipulate people.

Yet Amschel was corrupted - no doubt about that - dealing with underground mobsters, exploiting corporations, terrorizing populace to keep it in check, slavery and caste system are but tip of the iceberg of what he was guilty of. Yet, taking the whole world head on by myself was too much even for me.

Once I came back to reality, clarity began to return. Even if I had removed one person, the nature of the office and setup system would not change. That would need a lot more than just assassination. After all, it was nothing new. 9 out of 10 governors were the same. All of them were just in it for themselves. The rest was just acting under watchful eye of inquisition. At least they could keep the crooks honest. Since they are ones themselves.

A: Yhy. Sure.

A: Well, you don't know how many corrupted and insane assholes I have met in inquisition.

A: So what, that doesn't take away all those morons did to the world.

A: Yeah. Because centralized authority never bred morbid abuse of power. Especially infinite power of an inquisitor.

Among Griffins everything was so much simpler. It was just Humans versus Orks. But on Mara, every citizen was too mortified to even speak a word about Administratum, let alone point the finger. Forget about revolution and freedom



fighters. Unless tithe was disturbed, nobody bothered to even spit there.

I dreaded to imagine what kind of dark rituals did the elite perform in their basement as he continued to speak. I knew that it was happening even without evidence. Everywhere was the same. Service to self people always indulge themselves in vulgar display of borrowed power. And almost exclusively on random, unfortunate souls. This time it seemed to still be just good, old, greed and lust for power. Ego driven bastards. Yeah, If only it stopped there . . .

After so much pondering, I found myself in total silence. Doctor stopped talking a while ago. Coming back to reality, a few words of acknowledgment were enough to keep him in company. He tried to come up with rewards and even promised me to give BB, had I succeeded. No amount of reasoning or convincing was enough. Thing was, that I had a bounty on my head. Not that I cared, not first time in my life. If that was not enough, all I could think about was the haunting guise of A1, and just how even more brilliant could Black Betty be. Fantasies about courting such bountiful dame threw my imagination into overdrive.

Then, he just left me, to tend to remains of his organization while girl stayed behind. Bastard purposefully let her stand there, to influence my decision. But all for nothing. I left as well. All of it happened too quickly, too perfectly, too much without a consequence. Suspicious? All of it stunk worse than garbage slums in lower hive.

Emerging from the depths of base, remnants of massacre spiked me with their glances. Apparently they were told that we made a bargain. That was not the case. In the end, I did not even get to discuss him working for me. Like that would have ever happened in first place . . .

My delusions were done. I got back on my track to fulfill mission on Mara, finding the proper resource spots. Or so I told myself. Seeing destruction of the place made me realize extent of my actions. Some would say I should not felt anything towards those gangsters, but to me they were still people. And I have killed them a lot. I mean . . . a lot. I nearly decimated personnel of base and left ruin on the surface . . . just to . . . get some information about a girl. I wasn't particularly proud of that. Can't say for sure what has gotten into me. Well, now I can, but not back then.

That day was very long. I did not even feel like doing anything. Feeling own and guilty of what I just did. Nothing could wash stain on my consciousness. I traced back to my bike and rode back to my den traveling rest of the day.





— Arrival Day [42_] — Pursuit day [28_] —

I got back to my place by noon. Quick meal, if it could be called like that, and once again I was on my way out to continue searching for food sellers. Somehow, I was out of any strength. Out of any incentive. Out of life. Anything I could think of was BB. More than anything I was imagining horrific scenes how this bastard Amschel would treat her. Seeing how people moved around, how empty were the streets despite fine weather and early hours, made me think about this morbid totalitarian state. I sat on a bench in midst of mid hive plaza, looking at few rays of light still reaching beneath higher level. Swats of homeless, criminals, addicts and mobsters filled this nook with kiosks and stalls. Almost like flea market right next to giant, hoisting column, filled with neon lights and even a tree trying to grow in the middle. The only opening in ceiling was a shaft left open to let out exhaust fumes out of nearby factories. Few minutes passed and all Vox Casters, as well as Holograms fire up. Blissful noise of crowds disturbed by announcement of Lord Governor's speech to people.

Vids showed momentous figure of blond, bearded, immaculate man in his mid age, clothed in dark, green coat, golden plates and jewelry all around his hands, speaking from golden rostrum in company of elite nobles and "finest men of state". Following my trail of destruction, administration claimed results for themselves. Fiery speech of hypocrisy, propaganda and loathsome outright BS. A show of pretense and a vulgar display of power. Beneath them, cuffed in chains, crawled what looked like random people caught in the street, prisoners accused of a coup. Apparently government has struck a devastating blow to local gangs and criminal organizations last night, rendering biggest cartel, Crimson Raiders by name, extinct. The few poor souls kneeling beneath podium were executed on air as a warning sign to all opposition who would dare to stand in way of "righteous reign of protector governor". They were criminals now, but few hours ago, just a contracted criminal organization. As thousands of years passed by, I developed contempt of extreme prejudice for such people. It made my blood boil.

Anger and rage built inside me, seeing how everyone on the street bowed their heads and listen to this nonsense. Couldn't stand this brainwashing any minute more, so I walked away from any propaganda source as far as possible. A patrol of Militarum absolutely did not like idea of personal insubordination. When master Amschel speaks, the rabble listens.

Few shots of lasgun flew in my way. Hotshot laser rounds scorched rockcrete tiles around me. Crowd gathered in the street momentarily turned around and run. After someone yelled "stop, heretic!" panic overtook masses. Disregarding any courtesy, soldiers felled with hit of their weapons unfortunate souls standing in their way. Scared to death, mob scattered to four winds. Those who were able to, took cover, rest simply run away. On a moment notice, back alley plaza was deserted. The only one who stood in place was guy in restaurant. He couldn't just abandon his business and bail.

Tall buildings on side street had cascade of windows closing and barring. Living hub on bottom levels closed shut, while upper levels opened up to look at commotion. Between screams of mob, sound of vox casters was dimmed out for a moment. Dense smoke obscured any remaining sunlight.



Guardsmen surrounded me. 10 men with lasguns were clearly in itchy-twitchy finger mood. Although thugs in uniform was more appropriate. Normally, I would just let them be and back away myself, but these ugly mugs really infuriated me with how they treated fellow men. I suppose to them they were not people, but cattle.

What looked like sergeant, came close to me, spewing rubbish over how they were about to teach me some manners towards their lord governor. Without much of a thought, he pulled out slug pistol and ordered to fire.

First time they tried to shoot, my warp shield left their stupid faces in fear and agony. Their aura said everything without uttering a word. I can shrug off volcano cannons. Few lasguns are like a poor joke. Being overpowering is surely handy, and sometimes even fun. Sergeant was especially vociferous about how badly they mistreated my presumed mother to breed such freak. Next, they turned to lasguns and grenades. After a minute of shooting they started to break down. Without any proper discipline, they just started to abandon position and run. Cracks in line and in command. Such easy pray. I stopped standing still and hunted them down one by one, breaking their spirits, bones and . . . eventually spines. Sergeant was last in line. I did not torture him, just cracked his head at pavement. There was no mercy.

Either way, I shouldn't be doing it, but I could not think straight for last two days. I was unfortunately so full of myself, and in those last hours . . . so down, it all culminated in this petty murder.

Few streets further, I realized that my quiet days were over. Nonetheless, I killed sergeant on duty, so that is an automatic, another wanted bounty on my head. Yet this time it will be assassinorum hunting me ... and possibly inquisition, which was remarkably undesired. Witch hunters were last thing I wanted to meet.

Not that I cared, but bitching of narrow minded, brainwashed slaves was too much to take. Made me not want to go back at all. I had some time though. Cameras only picked up mask and a hood, but my accouterments were unmistakably distinct. I had to leave until there was still time.

Spaceport in the evening was teeming with noisy folks. I saw some musicians, clowns, charlatans and gangs loitering around. Food kiosks besieged by swarm of people. In local time, it was around 21 hours and orbital flights to docs were in full swing. I bought ticket without problems and reached my flight deck about hour prior to departure, deciding to wait for ferry or shuttle on pier benches.

Composite seats had seen better days. Fortunately back plates were tall and sturdy, so I could actually sit down and nap for a while. Not few second after I closed my eyes, A1 appeared in my mind. I just could not get her out of my head, but most importantly, I was still encompassed in tales of BB, trying to consider all "what ifs" and even tried to visualize how could I pull it off. But for now, it was just another day dreaming. There wasn't even remote shot at her. Seriously. Even if I got to her, how would I go about courting her. Not to mention how such vagabond would even get into the palace in first place, butcher through guards, stomp the defenses and turn whole place upside down just to find her? What if I would find only Amschel, and not her. Suddenly, I wished magician told more about her. After all there was not even a clue who to look for. Just a code name. Only things known, were great promises and flowery praising of her beauty.



For some time I forgot about whole world. My thoughts drifted away into other realm. So warm. So calm. So far away. And I existed in this bliss nothingness until another patrol of guardsmen showed up. Fortunately. Had they not appeared I would surely loose my boarding window. Departures showed flight to Hephaestus leaving in 2 minutes. Had to pull myself together and move forward. Nagging thoughts of leaving behind such wonderful mystery could not leave me be. As time of opportunity dwindled, I was still battling feelings in my heart.

Pushing aside my own interest in magician's art, world in shambles and my imaginations, I just had to remember my ultimate purpose. I had to slide to side my own desires to perform my perennial duty. The very reason me and my brothers were brought to life by Father so long ago. That's right. I had the power and strength to take up action, to stand yet again, against the tyranny brought forth by ego. Who else if not me would help to release this world from iron grasp of megalomaniac madman. After all, running away with my poor excuses would be just another failure. All these years I have fought. I stumbled and I fell . . . I cried in victory and failure. . . . But to give up . . .

Long deafening alert signal meant emptying of the dock. Flight deck 11/7 B cleared all its departures. The ferry was on its way. I stayed.

Mixed in confusion of bitterness, fatigue, lethargy and slumber, I started to immediately regret my decision. Again. As if it were not enough – another patrol entered space port asking around and stopping civilians. They were obviously looking for someone. Moved swiftly and coherently, no wasted steps or detours, as from storm troopers is expected.

They were not interested in me, even when walking past. I could once again sag back and ponder upon yet another bad decision in my life. With no one to help, overthrowing was not even an option. Assassination was the only viable action. Calling upon outside help would take at least few months if not years, I wondered yet again how my brothers would react. All my life I could not be as versed in political matters as them. Even with all my experience behind me, doubts still wormed inside my heart. This never ending comparison... I wondered what old man would say about his, but ... they were not there. They were nowhere to be found. Out of touch. Out of reach. And too busy helping ghosts of past to repair this broken world.

There I was . . . trying to play hero again. I haven't taken even one step, yet spiral of despair engulfed me . . .

Environs of space port were perfect place for outcasts, undesirables, criminals and life failures to blend into one, faceless goo. A perfect place for me as well. 12 millennia of warmongering did not help me. No reminiscence of valiant victories helped to sooth this incessant feeling of despair. Such quest would be nothing compared to defeating Tyranid army or Autarchs, or . . . my own brothers. Compared to war of Armageddon it would be a training session with paper dolls. But no matter how strong I became, no amount of power would fill that void in my heart. Even after so long, thoughts of my family were so far away from me. Perhaps that is how Father created me. And no one cared. No one would ever even know. History will always be fiction. Written by idiots who think themselves as informed experts, taking blood money, watching not to upset status quo of orthodox, conforming to feeding hand as cost of their dignity and soul.

I finally decided to pick myself up from the floor and do something. First



things was to get out of this hellhole. Even in slums like this, preachers and their entourage never stopped to proselytize masses. Damn idiots. After all those millennia, I even stopped cringing or grieving, or caring. No amount of facts or evidence could fight such far reaching indoctrination. The only thing I could do was to accept what Imperium became and work with it.

In night's embrace, candles and altars looked impressive, though. Especially in cramped streets of space port milieu. One thing you cannot deny them is splendor of their idols.

Shopping halls, food stalls, chop shops, traders, mercs and “indebted worker” traders clustered under giant ceiling of upper levels. Giant living hubs of long overdue renovation, built in serpent malign of constructive fury, spread vistas of rockcrete glory of Imperial cult. Monumental overpasses and multiple levels of Elkor capital city dwindled down near spaceport into low rise, for better reception. One could even see sky.

I did not have time for taking in views. Slowly pushing my pace through crowded streets, lots of dangerous figures scouted me out. If one could see through disguises and facades, he would notice that even a pocket of xeno traders hid in shadows, not to mention their psychic presence. Great was the populace set loose and without any custody. In place like this, even foul guardsmen did not tread lightly, which in turn led to breeding ground for all that was distasteful. Even sex workers were at display at all time, in the middle of the road. Some of them turned into joydolls already. Such petty sight. Slavery of this world was the greatest offense I could imagine against human soul. Everybody oppressed everybody. At the expense of everybody.

The further away from port, the less pestilence. At the fringes of sector 11, which no administration would ever dare to remember existence of, groups of humans tried to salvage what remained of their half broken souls. Prayers and local food gardens. That was all they knew. With various results. Magnetic illumination imitating sunlight deep under ground looked completely other worldly. There was even improvised chapel to the Emperor. Someone tried to copy painting of Grand Palace tapestry and frame it. Points for trying though.

Sitting at stone battlements, reminding of devastating battle, continually thinking how in the world could I pull of this endeavor without any ruckus, few kids from nearby dwellings came out to play in the backyard.

Lanterns floating in aqueduct served them as bow target. They weren't really trying to shot them. Just have fun shooting at all. I gazed in wonder how would they get arrows out of water in darkness of night. It was late, approaching 25-26 hours local.

In this vicinity there was no heavy industry to pollute air, but one could not speak about clean breathing. People were constantly coughing. After decades of inhaling thin smog, accumulation is deleterious. For me, however, unclean air is nothing to worry about. Different story was yet another homeless night. Looking at my surrounding, there was no place under roof to lay down. And I was too exhausted mentally to search for proper room. In place like this, not even few golden coins would buy me anything. There was nothing to buy in first place.

Old bunker wall had window opening with bars in it. Not that they were needed, since other side was completely walled off with rockcrete. At least it was dry. All that was left to do is to roll my cloak into cushion and go to sleep.



— Arrival Day [43_] — Pursuit day [29_] —

In low levels of hive city, it is hard to determine time of the day. All I could trust, was my PDA. Hoping it was still in place I reach to my back pocket. In place like this - you never know.

I woke up 2 hours to sunrise. Seemed like I didn't get a lot of sleep. 5 to 6 hours. But on the other hand, this place was no sleep room. I really got used to normal beds lately. First thing in my day - chewing up upon all the failures of my life leading to this situation. I had many far worse nights in inquisitorial dungeons, but it was all so far away I did not feel anything now. Like it never happened... This morning though, was real. My sore back as well. Stone windowsills don't make good beds.

Fortunately, planet was in summer time, so no need to worry about cold. On the other side, thirst was vexing. I dipped my filter stat into aqueduct. Moments later, there was something to drink at least. Did not stay for sun to show up. Had to move on, to the palace. My destination was clear, but the road I would take was harder to wrap my head around. Walking 67 kilometers was not an option. I did that stupid thing too many times on crusades. It never worked out well. Public transport would not take me, if not turn me in outright to authorities. By that time, my image was propagated through hundreds of millions of devices as one more wanted head. Fortunately for me, in sea of thieves. As you can imagine, Mara had great problem with criminal organizations ripping apart industry.

Ironically, I asked around but no one could even pinpoint me towards any smuggler. In the end all I could do was move slowly forward. Block by block, street by street. I surely made a kilometer or two before reaching a bustling crowd. Some kind of used goods market. Good omen. Some might actually have personal or trader vehicle. Maybe even aerial vehicle.

I had gold coins in my pocket. Enough to buy off the whole damn AV if necessary, however it would serve me no purpose in the long run. It wasn't time for overreaching but tangible action. Asking around was not easy. Most of the crowd had too many cybernetic implants found in dumpster. In great number, their cognitive ones.

Looking around this place I found all sort of thrash on sale. From secret Archeotech wonders up to Custodes' daggers. Of course, priced like governor's private collection. I truly felt sad for those who bought this piss poor counterfeit.

In welter of noisy bartering, there was one place unlike the rest. Just a temporary setup for selling used electronic parts situated in far corner, lighted only by ceiling floodlights. Behind counter, a guy with cyber upgrades more numerous than Space Marine veteran, almost on par with Tech Priests, was not interested at all in selling anything. Asking few probing questions revealed he wasn't typical seller. My query annoyed him enough to threaten me with a knife. A sign I just stumbled upon something major. Behind improvised kiosk stood military truck wrapped in camo. Taurox. But quite gutted and refitted for wheels, with large pack in the back. Definitely this one was not fitting into festival of trash knickknacks.

Man tried his best to keep composure even in face of every neon sign and



alert lights pointing and screaming - gang member. It somewhat impressed him that I wasn't even slightly afraid of him. We established I was a gun for hire. Theoretically. He said, that theoretically, was working with people in need. Especially when I noticed there are military boxes sealed with Imperial Aquila under that camo net.

Few minutes later we sat behind truck to talk a bit about my profession. Turned out he was one of few CR survivors. Name Samson. Kept low profile selling junk in this bomfuck middle of nowhere. I didn't say a word about my involvement. He talked about rest of clans joining forces against Amschel. Apparently, after this whole deal with destruction of biggest cartel and live execution, every CR boss decided to join and act in order protect their "business" and were mounting uprising coup in few next days. He actually gave me a holler about hiring sell swords . . . by Magician nonetheless.

Oh world, just how capricious and ironic can you be.

Doctor, being the only big boss remaining from Crimson Raiders, took over reins in following hours of Bunker Hill's decimation. Now I understood why he wanted to persuade me so ardently back in the bunker. And it worked. I ditched my duty to people, to Emperor and embarked on my way to find BB.

AWWWWWWWWW F*CK! . . . Had I only knew truth of it all back then . .

I would just . . . URGH!!!!!!

But, anyway, my options did not run out just yet. We made an agreement. He would take me to their base if I'd paid him a gold coin. There were others awaiting transport well. Our meeting was interrupted by a customer. Smuggler was not in any mood for transactions, so I proposed to take over the counter to kill some time. No objections there. Made some scratch for guy too, up to his total surprise. I always liked such little jobs. No worries, no killing, no bombs, death flying, no turbolasers shooting, no exterminatus happening . . . I genuinely missed some of such peaceful time. If only there was sky above me, instead of metal ceiling. Monumental girders, supporting columns, vents and underbelly vista apartments plotted into giant floodlight spots left few bare patched on rockcrete ceiling above. Places where poor masses hoped for better tomorrow. After the whole flee market loosened up, new guys appeared. We setup a rendezvous point. I had to wait two days before summit was up. Fortunately, gangs had a hole to wait out the heat.

Concealing my presence wasn't hard in this forsaken place. Sector 11 was tightly populated during waking hours and still had people working at nights. With a group of three other mercs, we rented out a room at rundown motel down the street and hunkered down. It was very long and awkward waiting. Samson picked us up in next night. It was about 23-24 hours local.



— Arrival Day [45_] — Pursuit day [31_] —

Our ride was long and painful. Roads, if one can call them as such, were not maintained for some decades. Holes and bumps were horrifically numerous. I'd say good guy smuggler prepared cushioned mattresses, if he was any good at all. More machine than man either. Apart from broken suspension, ride was smooth. We made it to the meeting point in the early morning. From 28 hour long day, we had 22 in front of us.

Hard to imagine suburbs in hive city, especially one so stretched, but this was the closest one could get to emptiness. Abandoned housing and factories amid rocky canyon 100 miles south, not in use for some few hundred years. It was a good place. We could see premises of palace wall on one side and monstrous hive city on the other. Massive spires shooting into the sky, dwarfed giant living hub of megacity. No matter how rotten inside, the view from outside was amazing. From one of goons, I learned highest layer was built little over 1 kilometers above ground. Due to loss of technology, during time of great expansion through thousands of years, techpriests lost ability to support new layers with anti gravity, which forced to stretch capital over valleys and hills. But officially, it was due to poor soil composition.

On site, some of the buildings were actually built on solid ground of bedrock. It was too long since I touched any kind of soil. Even in place like this, walking barefoot was actually pleasant. Warm sand of morning sunrise, of what remained from long gone tourist resort, was comfortable and welcomed after months city jungle. I could finally restore my distorted astral field. Even if just a bit.

Settlement lied between cliff walls. Ancient living hub steeped up into the height of cliff. Some big statues and pilasters still held on despite time. Magnificent view, even if it was so run down. I could imagine how nice it had to look back then.

On the low ground, large blocks of housing flats for workers. Small constructs along main road may have signified small businesses providing basic necessities for all inhabitants.

We weren't first to arrive though. Tens of other trucks scattered at feet of the cliff with many hundreds of hired guns. Some still kept coming. In early rising sun hour, convoy of another gangsters showed up. This time these were not trucks, but luxurious chariots in escort. Finally. Bosses have arrived. I did not care where were they from. My goal was set. Amschel. And nothing else. I already went too deep to back out now.

With my experience in criminal dealing, I learned to keep as afar as possible from the center of attention. Cutting through idiots who can't understand how weak they are, stopped being fun like 9 millennia ago.

It took few hours before main gathering took place, in spacious hangar carved into Cliff. Once, huge amounts appliance products were stored there. Some still lingered around. Destroyed by rust and dust. That day, thousands of underworld participants gathered with respective leaders to setup plan of overthrowing governor and setting up new reign. Up to my surprise all of them were on the same page. And what is even more flabbergasting, all of the expressed



to follow will of the Emperor. As long as they stayed like that I could keep working with them. Few sentences of greeting, some poor pep talk, a toast for better tomorrow and big players moved to side. Majority of all these folks were there just o start new war. Bellicose youth who wish to let up all their anger in vicious violence. Nothing to judge here. I have seen the same thing thousands of times before. And they all end the same. In failure. Criminal organizations couldn't overthrow market stand, not to mention legal and "unassailable" leader with standing army and whole citadel defense. It took me help of Astra Militarum regiment and Imperial Fist company to help Nathanis Prime. Few thousand gangsters are just cannon fodder. Bosses had to had other plans. Not that I cared. My aim was Amschel's head and finding Black Betty. I would use them to reach my own ends.

I spent my time looking at fuzzy clouds on top of block of flats. Refreshments aside, there was one major problem I had to consider. Getting in was very easy. I could do it at my own. Problem was getting out of death trap that is imperial palace. Again, on my own there would not be a problem, but with someone at my side it was impossible. Especially if that someone is lady desired by everyone who ever knew of her existence. Normally, I would just follow Captain's orders or create window of opportunity for extraction or tear down whole joint. My only option would be infiltration, killing the governor and flying away in AV. The more thought I put into this plan, the more absurd and crazy it seemed. There was no scenario which excluded confrontation with whole damn garrison. And there was no guarantee BB would willingly want to run away. Sure, she could have been against her will, but still . . . it was a damn Governor's Palace.

At high noon, sun was cozy warming. I took a walk over Rivus bank flowing behind settlement to ease my mind. When coming back to foundry, courier transport caught up to me. One of master's lackeys was send to pick me up. Someone either spilled the beans or I got a good recommendation. Turned out it was the latter. Gang bosses have seen footage of how I dealt with imperial guard squad. And since they were totally impressed, decided to invite me to talk me into their inner plans.

Inside ruined factory, giant machines stood still. Thousands of years old structures still held up. Thanks to mild environment, most of machinery was still usable. Created by Adeptus Mechanicus to last millennia, although paint as well as composites slowly disintegrated to dust. Huge production lines still had some of its produce on display. People must have abandoned this place in hurry. Once I focused on spirit a bit, to get a better feeling, memories of war in past opened up. What is deserted now, had been sprawling tourist attraction before armies came somewhere in past. Before I managed to dive in any meaningful way, bodyguards hastened me up.

We arrived at classy room, deep within the complex. This was definitively headman's chamber. It had all the luxuries important man could ask for. In the middle of room, at large, round metallic table, portable noosphere displayed layout of palace. I knew it instantly. All of them were constructed in same manner. The most efficient defensive positions and the most extravagant finishing. I visited thousands of them, could navigate them blind. More or less . . . Of course, each and every one had different touch, its own quirks and features. This one was no different.

Around table, in festive moods, and festive rich table, sat 7 men and 2



women. 9 under-lords of Mara. They were responsible for most of planet's criminal activity. One of them was the Magician. Sitting in what appeared to be center of this reunion, on the largest throne chair. After all, he took over Crimson Raiders. Aside from main figures, there were 9 bodyguards sitting further from the table. 1 at bar counter, 1 near foundry vista window, 4 at small table in corner, and 1 was standing behind bar. All of them were as impressive as bodyguards could be. Two . . . women among them looked more beefed than all other men in there, loosely resembling female figures at all.

I met their welcome with silence. After a while, Magician put up on display security footage of my skirmish with IG, but never uttered a word about my identity. Gathering was totally impressed. Some of them were terrified to host me in there. I could probe them mentally as much as I wanted and no one would even know. Magician was as usual, very talkative. Mostly about non important stuff, for he tried not to blow my cover. Few minutes after we begun, I was offered seat at the table near him. Gathering proposed to me plan of taking over authority structure of planet. Most of them were absolutely in awe of my capabilities. They thought that with my help, they could get rid of Amschel's cabinet and install their own people. I would infiltrate, remove governor and his most loyal supporters - 3 Noble houses of ancient origin, de Estana, von Rosette and Alastor as well as military support of Lord General Thymion.

They setup an uprising connected to all out invasion on palace. Their forces would hold up military forces stationed outside of palace proper, giving me time to get into capital spire. Doctor was so boastful of my abilities I tough I would burn inside with cringe. Good thing I had this mask. In the end it wasn't so needed. Good moods and alcohol made it easy. One question remained - my payment. They tried to sell me riches, influence, positions, power, even ennoblement, but I was yet reluctant to take anything. One of women, who looked like Sororitas porcelain doll asked me what would it take to buy me.

As blatantly and boldly as I could said it out loud. Black Betty.

Silence fell at once. In contrast to fatso on my left. As usual, he laughed out violently. The other woman prompts a question "what do you even know about BB"? I only told her what people on the streets were saying, trying to play along this masquerade. At once, all heads turned to chairman. Even he fell silent. According to him, it was a fair price. He also acknowledged my ignorance in this matter. Said that I could take whoever was found at that capital spire as well.

In manner of distaste, the same women threw some venomous words at me. Did not like my mask, me being psyker, and Emperor knows what else. Doctor had to intervene on my behalf. No one spoke up after that. Magician stood up and flipped some switches on noosphere's control panel. In all authority, he announced that I can count on this reward and no one else has claim to it. After that, he brought up blueprint of inner palace. With next few moments ideas surged about how to storm the building. Half an hour later, a very unsound strategy was devised. Doctor asked if anyone had any objections. Perhaps due to alcoholic flood or reservation towards their boss, those half brains didn't see obvious flaws in mode of attack. I spotted multiple. Even with my limited faculties one could see how bad their setup was. Essentially, I had to redo all of the assault plan.

Capital spire of Mara is multi ring construction built atop local hill. 3 layers of walls. Spire itself wasn't all that big. Just over 500 meter in diameter, 2

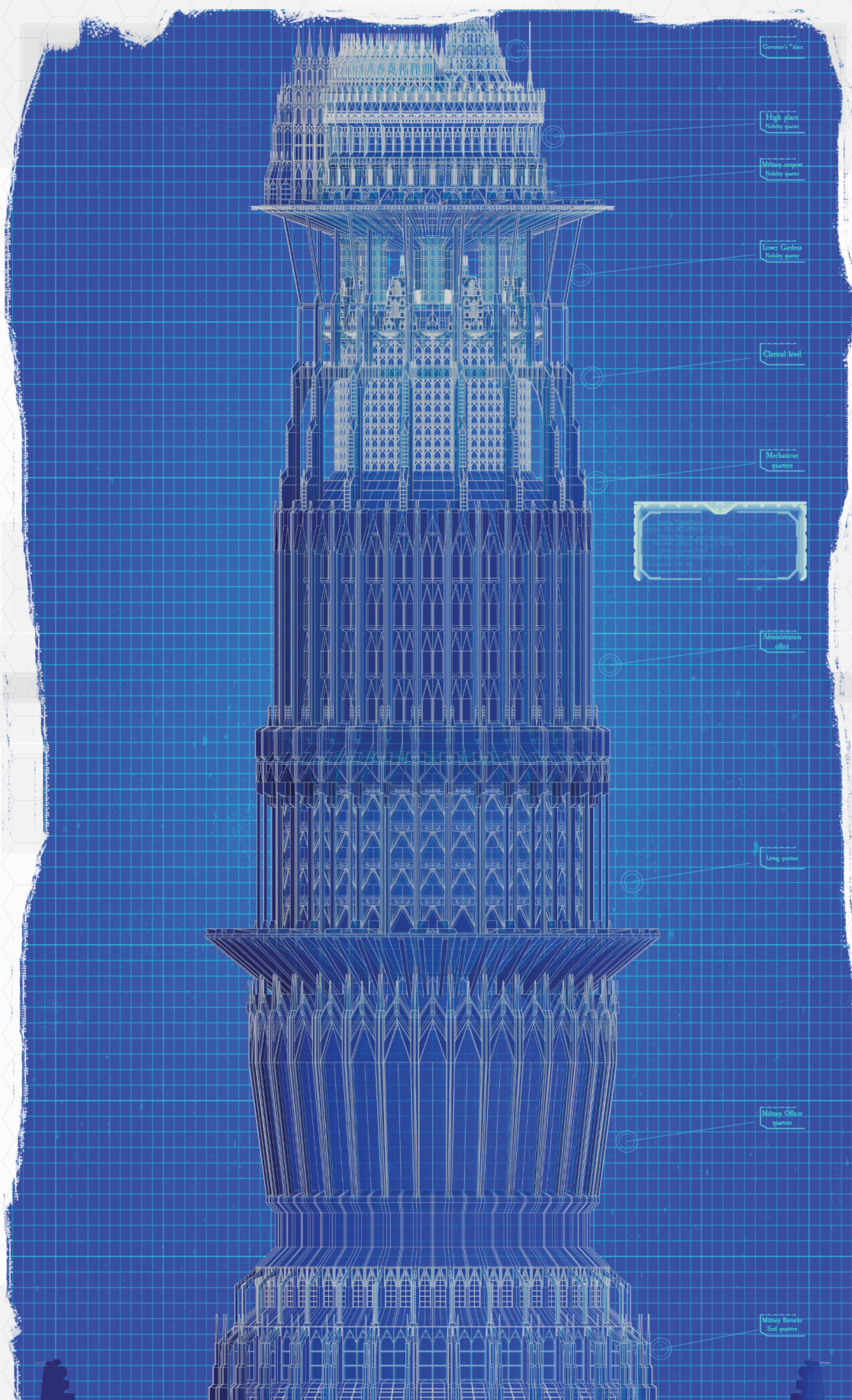


kilometers tall. Governor's palace is built on top of structure. Considering how grandeur has it been pimped out, actual living space wasn't all that big, reserved for most insecure ticks and leeches sitting at the top. From what they told me, only 6 of 17 biggest families had any residence within. Rest resided on other planets.

Most inner layer, called Palace Proper, housed most notable members of administration and nobility. Its wall measured mere 352 meter radius, but since it have been constructed on bottom of the hill, it served as fortified position as well. Via refurbishment during lat two decades ago, it became best fortified spire in whole sector. Only viable option of assault was not assaulting it at all . . . With gangster mob playing soldiers, not even 67 000 prepared people could take it. Their chances of survival were meager at best. Nests of turbolasers, plasma blastguns, vulcan rotary cannons, not to mention hundreds of heavy weapon fire points along whole wall. Such citadels are adequate to fend off Ork hordes and those idiots tried to take it without help of long range super heavy machines. Our only hope was to bring down east gate and just storm into the spire. Fatso promised that I will have my heavy support waiting once I arrive at scene, but . . . he expressed great belief in my powers, in manner which only made me mighty suspicious of this attempt. Nobody else noticed his peculiar behavior, almost like he deliberately hinted at something, in way only I understood. Problem of opening palace's east gate was only secondary. Before we even could take a look at it, we had to go through two other walls.

Space of middle segment stretched for another kilometer and housed most notable families working for upper society. It also had its own closed production cycle, with elite soldiers stationary 24/7. Since it was composed of mostly nobility housing with their luxurious city parks, it would be easy to get through. Problem came up when we discussed assault of outer wall. Not only was it another 2 kilometers of open space, but wall itself, 50 meter high, 20 thick has been reinforced by two feet of ceramite plating. Good luck storming it without titan grade weaponry . . . but then . . . I've done dumber shit before.

We choose to approach from Sun gate, as streets around Administratum Spire connected to surrounding wall, potentially helping us come closer without severe losses. It had serious disadvantage in form of damn large, open gardens running along main road to palace which would leave us to open fire for too damn long. West gate, as main point of transition, have been armed to the teeth. Due to proximity of administration offices, large groups of Imperial Guard stationed there full time. To remedy that, I decided we could use another point of attack. For instance Desert gate has fallen to rust, since behind it was only vast farmland. Even though still entrenched, this would be softer place to hit. I proposed to take front line assault and batter through initial defenses, to open free path for rest of their guns as surprise attack.



Professor had different plan - to pass me as one of hired guards and set me up somewhere near spire vicinity or even palace proper. One of thugs said he could do that, but then I would have to fight against "freedom fighters" not to blow my cover. For me . . . For me it was all the same. Everything I had in front of my eyes was BB. Something clouded my mind so much there was no other thing in the world. This opportunity dulled my senses and made go wishy-ishi. I did not notice how everyone was looking at me full of suspicions, with one exception as usual. In contrast, no one noticed how he looked at me, but myself. He didn't even look straight, but with corner of his eye, looking down on me with slimy grin of newly found toy. The wrong kind of toy. Only when I returned look back at him, in moment of connection, my senses felt how cold blood calculative he was. Yet no amount of composure keeping could hide ecstasy happening within his aura. And this aura . . . I swear I felt it somewhere before. It was . . . so out of place. Out of time. And . . . out of reach. Despite all my abilities, all I could see was surface energy patterns, which is so shallow any kid could learn to read it. It was another red flag, but . . . as it happens, something subdued my senses and I couldn't think straight.

In this moment, I would only drown in what ifs that cannot bring even correlations without any evidence. At least I knew all of them were on the same side of this uprising, even if all were drunken like sweaty squats.

Dismal glances struck me every now and then as doc has reviewed the plan. In final stage, a contact for me was arranged inside palace defense force. I would be posted in perimeter of wall defenses at Sun Gate. When attackers pushed IG to outer palace my job was to infiltrate and move towards governor's chambers, hold him hostage and let their forces to occupy spire. After closing arguments, he told me . . . "don't be afraid to take matters in our own hands". "After all, there will be no better option". And as that wasn't ominous enough, he paused speech to let silence fall to finally add "You'll see . . ." eyeing me like twisted clown. Damn . . . if only something didn't black out my thinking then . . . Maybe, just maybe . . . this whole story wouldn't happen.

I sensed nobody except Magician trusted in me. Even if the plan of attack I came up with was sound and solid, putting whole victory in hands of one hired gun, who just arrived unannounced, out of the blue, didn't settle right with company. Masked and enigmatic, yet claiming greatest treasure desired by everyone else as his price, wasn't comforting at all. Not to mention that I had two bounties on my head already.

I did not even bother to answer all their accusations. Literally keeping my mouth shut. You just never know who is listening. But one thing was sure - they didn't have another choice. Alone, they wouldn't even scratch the surface. Being psyker was not only additional power, but a psychological move against garrison.

All hostilities subsided after professor made up some quests he once had given to me, so easily yet at the same time believably, even I was thrown off. Fuuuuuuuck . . . some of them were my real life stories from past with just small things changed . . . Even that didn't wake me up . . .

Nah, it's alright.

Some things were supposedly crucial to BL and CR interests survival and prosperity. He painted me as unsung shadow hero of cartels. Despite "acknowledgment" of the gathering, it still felt fake and cringe. I honestly



doubted anyone believed this lie, but silver tongue had its way around small people. His persuasion capabilities equaled body size. It wasn't just about charisma. He knew how to manipulate words and people's emotions.

Few minutes into celebration for the dawn of new power to rise, and all seemed to forget about my existence. A lone chair in corner of the room was all I wanted. Socializing with gangsters was not my prime directive, even if I had to be one from time to time. Only bodyguards seem to sparsely notice me. Nevertheless, that would be display of bad manners towards my new founded company. Even if I was sitting at the table with everyone else, next to fatso in center, nobody seemed to care anymore. As party proceeded in colorful bloom, main star of the night has arrived in company of two additional bodyguards whom I recognized from Bunker Hill . . . A1.

When she entered room, air and mood significantly changed. Drunken like squats and noisy as dying brakes of train, everybody tempered at once. Some with gasp of amazement, some with expression of bliss, invited her into company. Or was it only my imagination.

This time she did not feel empty . . . Blast it. This time she was even more inviting and seductive. Her movement was much more fluent. Did I miss it the first time? I honestly cannot tell anymore . . .

Ridiculously long braid and fringe up front, with a glimmering red rose nicely tucked in. Long and voluminous, black, Goth dress decorated in golden flowers so frivolously breezy and yet so tight on her luscious shapes. That unblemished skin decorated by glittering golden necklace embedded with crystals. Her delicate girlish face underlined with carmine red lips and thick smudge over eyelashes.

After taking seat next to me, on right of her creator, festivities resumed. Even skulking blobs on the couch took time off doing their drugs. She was very quiescent, not the soul of company at all, but certainly center of attention. Of all guests present, she nodded at me as first and no one else have gotten to see her smile. Some heads turned to me, seeking my reaction and reason. In fact so much, I could feel the astral daggers slicing at my very soul.

Then, there was she . . . I couldn't contain myself, saying hello. Few folks were intrigued to see me behave so casually towards her. And I might say, that so did I. It wasn't just to keep my appearances, but genuine interest and . . . I don't know? A freedom? Ease? You know.

From background chatter, only some sentences made sense. My extended hearing became obstructed. From what I could gather, no one knew that doll was designated "A1". All referred to her as "Ada". And it seemed that she was not actually output of frog face. Turned out she was treated more like daughter than lover or experiment.

Have I missed so many things in that bunker? How many more could I really miss?

Suddenly, I began to doubt myself again. Not because of fleeting information, but because of A1. Really trying to convince myself, that two days earlier that this doll wasn't worth my time. Now however, it didn't feel like empty doll. Something had to change. Must have. Magician tweaked this body somehow to not give out this null void feeling. There was no other possibility. Even in such shambles I would not be so psychically dull. I've been in far worse condition too



many times and know the extension of my limits. Maybe because hour was drawing late and I had not a good sleep in few days. It was getting late, one or two hours until full moon.

Most of light in room originated from noosphere on center of the table. Some ambient lights lit up most crucial places, but lightning was at large off. This mask I had, with multiple scalar field spectrum filter in visors, was dimming it even more, though I could not say it was dark. Holoovid tuned into musical channel. Local variety of electronic "music" if it even could be considered "not a noise". Underground music accompanying duo of holo dancing figures filled chamber. It painted somewhat rusted room with nice rainbow light emerging from dancing colors, on par with a lamp. Seeing how everyone was partying so hard, it felt like I was the one missing out on my life. Instead of wasting myself with drugs, I decided to eat up. To do that, I had to take off mask and hood. It is something I avoid, due to my . . . unusual appearance. "Professor", as everyone called him at that point, already knew and understood my . . . peculiar case. Everyone else did not.

A: Due to my unique genetic makeup, I subconsciously and constantly channel energy of the astral into physical world. My astral bodies are setup to be constantly open to toroidal aetheric flux.

A: Do you even see my eyes glow?

A: Yeah, it is very pretty, and to 99% of people, very mutant. Dead giveaway of my psychic powers. Inquisition tends to dislike that very much.

A: Actually, my eyes are populated with certain species of cells reacting to warp energy frequency changes. Due to its genetic and molecular structure, they serve as superconductor for astral energies.

A: Yhy . . . just like when you first met me.

A: That's not how I remem...

I had to eat at least something before tomorrow's operation. On front line, food was a luxury. Like shy, shadowy figure, I crept behind table to grab some meat sticks alongside bottle of water. Everything would be fine if a certain person wouldn't call me out on it.

A1. Or maybe this time I should use name Ada, gazed at me with her big, golden eyes, walking right next to me. Unlike two days ago, they were not dead anymore. There was that spark, twinkle in her eyes. From closer distance I could sense something within her. A life force. Simple, not yet fully sentient and aware, but familiar. Well, considering how average person was brainwashed and indoctrinated in this world, her soul was on even ground. And it showed. To check it out, I picked up some sandwiches near from side table. Lamé excuse, but any was fine. Fatso, with most of leaders, were playing drinking chess game at the bar. Remaining girl and boy were missing, in restroom – standard. Save for two people, table was free. The only one remaining was vociferous lady who previously had issues with my presence. And everyone else, actually. She eyed me constantly, for moment we even exchanged glances. From her expression one



could assume she never had seen eyes like mine. Or never seen any powerful psychic overall. Glowing eyes are very rare, and in sanctioned cases, very sought after by elites and powerful authoritarians, as its sign of untamed warp energy flowing through host. And is mighty pretty. Perfect honorific bounty for the almighty rulers. Or a sign of disaster coming, if you ask any inquisition.

Even Ada felt some of it. Somehow it was not a doll anymore. Now it was a vehicle for soul and could connect via psychic communion, which in itself is impressive. Her bioroid wiring was evident, but embedded spirit gave her absolutely new identity. The intricate and delicate movement she performed were no more robotic. However, most evident was look on her face. Two days ago it was cold, stony, now full of ... life. Eyes of beauty, so vibrant and graceful, rolled from side to side in natural, smooth action. Robotic tension of mouth muscles were now full of genuine, shy smile. She was alive. Suddenly, I became overtaken by desire and magnetic attraction. Death magnetic. Alas, yet again, I was drawn to her. A choice to let go or give in. A choice indeed . . . I thought, if not now, then never.

We spoke few sentences. Simple and ample, asked how was she, then praised her appearance, things like that. That dress, from up close was astonishingly well highlighting her amazing body. I am quite sure, that everyone in this place aimed at this body even more than at seat of governor. Me including, though I tried to fight it and keep composure. Damn, her beauty was a wet dream come true.

I wondered how it looked like from someone else's perspective.

My feelings were letting loose and I caught myself getting cozy in her presence. How in the world had this mad scientist managed to host a soul in already grown body . . .

When I took a chance to look at him, he was already observing us with corner of his eyes. And for this brief time, as we gazed at each other, it was obvious everything was all going according to plan. His plan. I begun to question whether this uprising was whole point of this gang wars. My red light fired up in screeching alarm. Intense burning filled my chest. My heart energy nexus was being strangled by something, like acid poured into my chest. I needed to take my mind off this situation and realign in solitude, excusing myself for some eating.

I focused on buffet. Released every other thought than that of hunger and feasted upon all sorts of wonderful dishes. Surprisingly, these foods were not lab grown but organic. I could feel the sun kissed grains of wheat in the bread and green pastures of cattle grazing in mountains. This stuff was better than what I would have even at nobility table. Without such food, grooming Ada into her shape wouldn't be ultimately possible. This party must have costed small fortune. But when you plan suicidal run for tomorrow, you at least want to have some pleasure today. That meal was awesome. Not a meal per se, but to me that food accounted for all eating since two days, so it was. . . And so good I could eat it all day, every day. Those fried meats were delicious. I just hoped it wasn't stuffed with flavanoid, cancerogen flavor enhancers. . . Soon Ada joined me at table.

What looked like good idea, quickly transitioned into festivity of clumsiness. Fact that only few days ago she was just an empty doll wasn't immediately registered, so I tried to talk to her like any normal person, you know, trying to ask her around. For me, it was no problem, but for her . . . it was very hard to talk to anyone in the first place, much less with someone so interested in



her. Girl was used to obeying commands and fulfilling tasks. She did not get much experience in socializing or talking, particularly to guys. Especially those, who were so much shorter than her. Her way of talking was very shy and backed out. She tried her best not to be secretive, yet years of conditioning prior were clearly evident. She would sometimes look at me in short glance. After few subjects talked over, it turned out some of the served food was her own cooking. I highly praised her delicious creations. In the end, I was consuming these snacks in spades.

Matter of her "change" was out of question, though. She could not tell me how it happened. Just that she began to be aware, remembering herself and did not even know how and when it happened, even though it was just two days since our meeting. She remembers everything that happened through years. To her, all this seemed like being snapped into reality after long period of daydreaming. That's how she described it.

Before I managed to take it further, her "father" and his pals joined in again, which effectively ended our conversation. Bickering laughter between underlords was too loud and too heinous to listen to. We relocated to our seats, back to main table.

I really started to feel bad about her. The only thing she knew was this vile behavior. It resurrected the feeling of . . . "saving" her. One thing was very clear - she did not belong here and neither did I. And he saw it too. I almost did not want to look at him as he sat himself in chair next to us. That goddamn grin on his face was almost psychopathic in nature. I had an idea what he was aiming at, after looking back at Ada. I swear it was some telepathic communication between them in that brief moment, after which he stroke her hair, patting on head.

It looked like he finally felt accomplishment. That much anyone could tell. Somehow, he managed to finally bring soul into her body, and achieve ultimate genetic experiment on par only with Emperor's work, after decades of arduous trials. And he knew how much I was drawn to her. Or how dubious I felt about this whole situation. At least we both knew the game we played. Well . . . after all of it . . . it's obvious he just let me believed so.

Ada, though so grand and beautiful, was very shy in company. Edmund tried to cover for her and fill some parts. Everybody wanted to befriend her. Conversation trailed over how awesome was to meet with her "sisters". In instant flashback, I suddenly remembered tales of Black Betty. He promised me so much more and elevated my expectations sky high through the roof. BB was the reason I actually stayed behind didn't I? What if she did not even exist and this was just a call sign for his operation. Or even more - I was fed faulty information to begin with, just to be of use in time like this. How could you possibly create something more elaborate, exquisite and masterful than Ada, who now being soulful entity has truly become the pinnacle of divine feminine, sitting right next to me. Real.

While I frowned my brows in disbelief and doubts, everyone around was laughing in prime time. Seemed like everyone actually enjoyed their company. Even grunt studs were welcome to join in. Over reactive imagination launched me into calculating frenzy. I even stopped eating, drinking, breathing, looking or communicating. It wasn't coherent and creative thinking, but fear based "what ifs". Even though I was nearly indestructible, slaying warbosses, bloodthirsters, titans, and whole armies across the galaxy. Even Necron Lords. He could not put a scratch on me or even pull a hair out of my head. What was he playing me into?



It was not a matter of power or a game of authority. I was being pawned and knew that very well. And the source of this pawning were my own deep desires. Doc knew his way around people. It made me loath myself, for falling to those empty promises. Giving me hope . . .

I looked at Ada and caught her haze for a moment. We looked at each other for a brief second. Then I looked back at him. He already stood sideways to me, talking to a guy, but eyeing me obnoxiously. Right then, lighting changed and everything covered in dark shadow. From backdrop lights, we could see only outlines of each other. His eyes looking down upon me, in faint reflection of noosphere on his glasses. How his mouth widened from ear to ear, turning into psychedelic grin of contempt and ecstasy, only flicker shadows know. Even though he seemed to talk to someone, he was 100% focused on me. And he savored the moment. I felt like world was slowing down to a halt. His expression burned into fabric of time. Into fabric of my mind.

But I wouldn't let him win. Not until BB would finally be mine. This . . . if I were to be used, then I would at least take my share.

I got up and left, back to my vintage point on the roof of blocks of flats. Spending cold night in outside was not my best idea, no matter how beautiful stars looked. Eastern rims of Segmentum Obscurus had the widest view of galaxy of any planets inhabited. Specially the nearest nebula. Called by locals Rainbow Nebula, it was fired up in neon rainbow colors due to proximity of its magnetic filaments, visible in full bloom, miles outside industrious districts. If it wasn't so cold, this would be the most beautiful scene in my few late centuries. Just few parsecs away, monstrous in size, covered a quarter of horizon. I enjoyed this vista only few minutes more. Needed to search for place to lay for the night. It already was past midnight and gang party slowly died out. Drunken shouts and shooting were more and more sparse.

Almost all were sleeping inside foundry, where proper sleep rooms have been setup. Elites had their own quarters, but I could bet not many were actually sleeping. Alcohol and women were most common flavor of such nights. Made me think if Ada was going to be . . . given to someone.

This question would not rest. I could not rest either. Squatting in empty homes would be good if not for the cold. Remaining heating apparatus was warm only in dreams, while merciless howl of freezing breeze filled inside. It was time to fit in once more.

Taking stairs would too lengthy. Jump from 36th stock window was quicker. Tensile strength of my body, reinforced with psychic power, was enough to land without problems, though concrete pavement tiles weren't happy about it. I didn't care for random bystanders slating data about it. After all, I was their trump card in tomorrow's operation. It was better to make them realize who they were dealing with. Gangsters had blast filming it, since equipment was already in place for their shooting contest. This piece made its way into common circulation faster than I reached workshop. Once inside, I finally begun to warm up, roaming halls dimly lit up by halogen lamps along main walkways. Most of noises coming from main rooms was just party music and shouts. Headman's chambers were situated almost on top of this cursed ruin. On my way up, lots of groups were having lots of fun in separate rooms. Even if I despised this way of life, robbing and killing for sake of own ego, keeping oneself in company was something I could envy all of them. The only ones I could really keep in company of were space marines, who



by virtue of their nature were not most vibrant company at all. Feelings only spiked, when I saw . . . ehhhh . . .

By the time I reached into boss den, it was empty already. In dark room only food leftovers reminded of recent meeting. Noosphere dismantled, bar emptied, chairs taken away, rusty stools tucked under table.

I asked few punks how party stopped, but no one could give me definitive answer, neither where bosses stayed the night. They also described how big blonde girls got escorted out by one of bodyguards out of building. Wild thoughts crept into me, spiking my chest. Now that I think of it, it surely was disappointment. Wasn't sure where to put my blame on, but I wanted to point the finger so much. Just not on myself. All those millennia of loneliness made me comfortable in my tolerance for solitude, but something dug out desires of company. I didn't even care about bed. Air was warm enough to keep me cozy, so I laid myself on cold, hard, steel floor over the counter and set myself to rest. Falling asleep was no problem at all, even chewing through thoughts didn't stop me.





— Arrival Day [46_] — Pursuit day [32_] —

Getting up was a real pain. Early morning in such places, in ruckus and noise, echoed through empty halls like bell. I woke up due to some great rumble. Few people who were transporting materials had dropped pallet on steel catwalk. In following minute, lots of yelling and screaming had finally made me get up. Sun was already up. This was some long hour rest, despite vividly uncomfortable floor. Maybe it wasn't long enough though. . .

I was still tired, and night wore me out. Good thing the leftovers were still there. Long gone were times I had lavish breakfast like this, so I ate up to the full. But more than having food, I wished to see certain someone . . .

Fantasies of the night. And dreams that never come true. There she was yesterday, right in front of me, yet I could not bring myself to ask her out, how would I try to take on Black Betty? This felt ridiculous. I can't even exactly remember when was the last time I got married. Somewhere around 4 000 years ago. For those like me, dates do not matter anymore.

Few moments of depression were enough. Time to get out and start preparing. Walking out from complex, one of yesterday party's bodyguard came up to me to fill me in on the plan. Schedule was tight, we had to move on at once. My contact in the Palace was expecting me to arrive by 10 AM which by local standards would be early morning. At least you could get some sleep before going to work.

Car we were using, proved to be relic of the past. Like really old. From times frontier first settled this planet 5 000 years ago. Back then it, would be technological marvel of off-road transportation, but now it was junk. Bare bone junk. It's suspension handled urban roads, but holes and crevices were so fatally bumpy I expected to fall through floor. To kill time, I studied once again our plans for attack.

Unlike in most cities, Imperial Palace and core of Administratum was situated outside main hive, 22 kilometers from city center. Mainline road connected city center with capital spire. From main Hub to outer walls, series of smaller development housing fields stood outside tall walls. These were clearly a high profile personnel homes. Clean, tidy, spacious and regularly maintained neighborhood. Some of them were surely noble houses. Not for long it seemed. In few hours, Sun Gate would be stormed.

Main thoroughfare between palace and city was wide and rowdy. Trucks were sparse. Almost all goods were delivered by AVs. Only private citizens were roaming these streets on foot or in cars. And increased patrols of Militarum. In some places, palace had multiple forward sentry points, fire ports and barracks. Some people strolled near waterway, taking a walk in the morning. Terrible grip in my chest almost hurt thinking about what was to happen in few hours. Nothing started yet and I was already feeling guilt, but hoped my victory wouldn't feel hollow in the end. Many times before, my bad decisions would cost life of millions, but his time felt different. Despite inciting rebellion against whole planetary governments few times before, this one felt like I did it first time. Perhaps I got cold feet, feeling in over my head.

Our half dead and strainer like hull appeared in stark contract to new and



pristine transports of locals. It wasn't merely accident, but a sign in itself. All we had to do is to drive to the checkpoint. Few guardsmen talked in between themselves in checkpoint booth, while we waited. No one came near to talk to us or to ask our permissions. In few minutes gate lifted up and we were clear to proceed further. The easy part was over.

Closer to Sun Gate, inspections were tighter, although no one questioned our presence. Our deep cover would only get us to the main archway of the gate. It was fortified and siege resistant. Capable of anti titan warfare. Impressive as in every case of palace defense. Large amount of heavy weaponry and artillery on walls. In addition to static defenses, half of 1st regiment stationed at palace. Two Stormlords and dozens of Chimeras guarded entrance both in front as in back of the barricades. Vehicle movement was strictly prohibited in this area. We could only proceed on foot, meaning I had to go on foot. This point was driver's returning one. He left me near palace metro train station. In place like this no one would notice additional someone in the crowd. Majestic station was built into outer perimeter walls. It had direct connection to administration central. No IG would bother crowds. Everyone who came here had much bigger problems - bureaucracy. Most merciless weapon of state - paperwork, permissions, allowings, grants, quills, reporting, scripts, taxes, freight movement, and everything else needed for planetary logistics concentrated in one, giant cathedral of Adeptus Administratum. Some less important offices had been moved outside Administratum to ease the masses in everyday charade. Massive logic engines and cogitator workstations served by hundreds of servitors and scribe clerks helped out arriving hive with their deeds. I had to go through all the way to the Depatamento Munitorum to reach my contact.

Exit from wall emplacement ended in yet another scanning checkpoint, but before I could get through scanners, some patrol blocked me. Routine control or random mugging? Neither. These guys look like serious business. It wasn't standard Military outfits but fully enclosed mercenary armor. Clearly professional. Everything could be deduced just from the way they walked, or moved. No wasted movement. Well trained.

I did not want to make a scene, so I complied to their demand. I only hoped my mask would not appear on Wanted Bulletin Board at that very moment. Since Mara was Agri world, so vital in everyday lifeline of entire sector and beyond, presence of Imperial Guard was increased and highly concentrated in capital. Loosing myself right now was last thing I wanted to do.

Those people took me back to big, spacious hall, which was part ecclesiarchy, part Militarum. In that hall, great statue of Emperor towered over little people. These bonkers sure as hell never knew how to make image of Emperor in stone. Just another skull reaper in cape. At his feet, chanter and priest alongside processing servitors were reading holly passages of Lectitio Divinatus. I hoped these clowns would end in worst fire possible. If Father had seen this tragic comedy, he would cry himself to death, seeing how low has humanity fallen. And how far borderline service to self butchered his vision of freedom.

Somewhere on the far side of this great chamber, door to security room would open and soldier inside made some hand sign directed at people who escorted me. No one asked even one word from me, no one said a word about me. Once inside, I was directed to private room of commanding sergeant. My contact was already there. Another hired gun in mask. At least he was talkative and filled



me in on my assignment. He arranged a backdoor entrance to be opened at specific hour and time. One of guards would smoke cigarette and open gate in the basement for a minute, which was my only chance to get past sentries unnoticed. Unfortunately, he couldn't get me into the ranks of guardsmen, so instead I was given fake id to get through doors. Pass was valid only in outer perimeter, so good old fashioned infiltration was only way into palace proper. Short briefing about concentrated forces, exchange of notes and we parted ways. I headed straight to marked spot, down the alley and after two corners opened staff only door, leading to the underground supply routes. It was almost forsaken land. Catacombs underneath stretched miles and miles in all directions. Fortunately, signs made finding my way easy.

Basement was fairly big compared to standard corridors, built for purpose of moving not only troops but large cargo. I waited on crossroad station and listened for every noise I could, because informant couldn't tell me which door it would be. Making ruckus this early could jeopardize whole operation. There were 5 hours till W hour. Time in this poorly lit and deafening quiet seemed to be eternity.

Hour has passed and nothing happened. In times like this, when you don't have anything under control, worrying about missed sign or turn grows into gargantuan burden on your mind, even if you meticulously planned everything.

After two hours of waiting I couldn't sit tight anymore and strolled around, waiting, vigorously pricking up my ears. I was focused to point of hearing flow of air. Half an hour later, something happened. Large metallic scraping sound followed by few steps of military issued boots. This was it. I did not rush, but took careful steps.

In one of the corridors, guardsmen was leaning against staircase's rail and smoking. I looked at him from around corner. He noticed me and stopped his cigarette for a second. After he got back at it, all was clear - my window of opportunity. I put up field of noise disruption and prepared myself to enter into the lair knowing nothing of what lies behind them. Seconds after I went through, they closed again.

Corridor led straight. No possibility of straying was good sign. After all, if my infiltration would fail, the whole plan would fail, and I did not need any kind of choice roulette before whole thing even begun. Of course it does not imply everything went as planned. Why would it. Life hated me so much already, why stop now . . .

It led me to storage bay under barracks inside wall. Place looked vacated. I carefully navigated my way up to main hangar and then to officer quarters. There was nobody home. Only few life signs walked around. From empty rooms I could see Stormlords guarding rear of entrance about 300 - 400 meters away. Housing designed for senior staff, some rooms even had luxuries within. I cautiously walked out of building into inner square, where soldiers were drilled into something. Now it was 2 kilometers to inner wall, and next kilometer to palace proper.

On outside, few workers and tech priest were finishing setting up weapons and fire support platforms. Cleaning up machinery was all that was left to do apparently. I watched through window near exit as chimeras were loaded with equipment. And then . . . ehhehh . . . the unforeseen struck me from behind.



I did not notice how one of officers would sneak upon me. Tapped me on the shoulders, asking what was I doing in off limits area. Something in my stomach rolled over. Hot energy filled my guts and jerk move of turning around left me completely open. But he wasn't pointing gun at me. Contrary. He mistook me for one of hired mercs to keep line at the gate. I didn't say anything not to blow my cover, just followed him around. He didn't suspect a thing for now, but my adrenaline was pumping hard. I tried my best to not to commit any mistake. Before we walked outside, he insisted I wait here a while until he gears up. Maybe after all I was introduced into ranks. Brief moment later we were on our way to the Sun Gate in Gorgon transport. I asked what was the rush. He was crestfallen to hear it. Red alarm suspicion level three on his face, but answered that they had intel indicating insurrection in short time, and was flabbergasted my commander didn't inform me. Tried to play it down by painting it only as friendly chat. I could only pray there was no another mercenary at where we were going.

Unfortunately, we moved in opposite direction to my desire, towards entrance gate and disembarked some distance behind super heavy engines over barricade pieces. There were at least four platoons, around two hundred men in defense of gate. Walls stationed by two brigades around perimeter. Three battalions defending inner palace. 12 000 thousand battle ready soldiers. Seeing how it was laid out, I hoped I wouldn't have to go through all of them. Attacking forces wouldn't be able to overrun this wall. I had a bad feeling about this.

Commissar lady in front of defense line was instructing poor fellows how to fight for Emperor against tyranny and wickedness of all bad people who were not the official power. And some other blah blah blah numb b-s. Irony was lost to me thousands years ago. Cringe washed away long time ago. Now, it is to me as inert and bland as rocks on ground.

I did not know who was setting up who, but clearly this battle was prearranged. I suspected that outcome as well. Stomach rolled inside out and nausea gave in. What if BB wasn't even there. All this stinks more that hive slums in summer. My first thought was why Magician wanted me so much. What did I miss. What game was I dragged into. If it was indeed a setup, then they clearly didn't need me.

Instead of despair, great anger befallen upon me and it manifested as aetheric, lightning discharges around my auric field. Guardsmen became morbidly terrified, spouting curses of mutant and heretic. Sergeant, at first full of disbelief, now humbled down and tried to calm me down, so I would not direct this power at wrong team.

Apparently no one was aware they would get psyker to help them. More that this, commissar did seem to recognize me from wanted list. And was scared. That footage of my dealing with guardsmen before became very famous. Later, I learned that people saw in me blessing of the Emperor upon the faithful ones, to fight oppression of the governor. Sergeant took it as bad omen but commissar quickly brought him in line, stopping any superstitions.

I settled down, sat on the curb and tension slowly faded. She didn't try to kill me or even bring up to conduct. Mighty suspicious if you ask me. All I could do to pass this time was to slam my back against wall and meditate in quiet. All pieces were in place. I made my choice. If I was deceived then I would take responsibility for my foolishness. At this time, nothing could be done about her being there or not, neither about this plan. Suddenly sadness and loneliness



surfaced through. Memories of Ada crushing my determination. It all felt like a bad dream. So out of place, even if I had done it thousand times before. I felt in over my head for first time since 1000 years . . . wanted to run away, just vanish, disperse and be as far as possible. After such long time, emotions feel like new.

Fortunately, my skulking was interrupted by commissar shouting out orders. I was placed behind heavy equipment to provide long range support with marksman squad. Veronica made it especially clear that I had a lot of sins to repent for, in face of the Imperium.

For fuck's sake . . .

Two hours later first report of uprising came rushing in. Everyone started to get snappy. In one moment, all soggiess disappeared from troops. Large group of warring civilian population swept through low layers of city. I have to admit, that waiting in fully closed environment directly under high noon sun was discomforting.

Finally, at 18 hours perimeter outposts reported heavy assault of thousands of assailants. Mob riots with serious guns and firepower rolled through initial defenses as water on sand. Lots of people died in skirmishes. It took only 30 minutes for mob to reach Sun Gate. Commissar was merciless, ordering to mow down everyone. Stormlords slaughtered all who approached, man or machine. Initial wave was shattered. Hundreds fell dead even before reaching Sunlight square. Walkways and streets were paved in blood. Stormlord's vulcan cannons ripped walls, railings, cars and statues apart. Furious rage of heavy autocannons and heavy bolters roared onto incoming enemies. In this mob, there were no friends. There was no human either. Just nameless, faceless masses viciously fighting against fate . . . bullshit. I have seen this bullshit too many times . . .

Sun Gate was well defended. No ad hoc army would penetrate it. Some lads actually felt bad for all killed people. By next hour, attacks lost on intensity, but happened across wider length of wall. Central Command ordered to hold insurrectionists at bay at all costs.

But then, another tactic was implemented. Of course it was outside any parameters we had discussed prior night. Suicide bombing runs took heavy toll upon defenders. Hundreds of desperate workers and mutants threw themselves en mass on defenders, blowing gigantic hole in outer defenses. More over, suicide aerial runs aimed at heavy equipment remained unanswered due to lack of Hydra mobile defense. How HQ didn't see those coming from miles away wasn't a mystery anymore. From all I have seen, it was as plain as a day, that all this attack was nothing more than circus. And I couldn't see why.

It took only about 20 minutes to devastate 3/4th of heavy equipment. Since I wanted to be pushed back, I held my powers still hidden. Walls, despite measuring almost 50 meters, became smoking pot of ravaged weapon positions. Of course, it was just superficial damage from fire bombs, but it really looked like whole lower hive roused up in arms. Everything happened in quick succession. Suicide runs as well as aerial ramming left my senses stretched, forcing me to focus on avoiding stray fire. One stormlord was directly hit by large craft filled with explosives, becoming immobile. Another AV hit second Stormlord directly in vulkan turret, rendering it inoperable.

After being pinned by overwhelming force, commissar decided to fall back a bit and create choke point out of gate. Why she didn't order to close it, and



defend perimeter on walls is mystery beyond even Emperor's foresight. Or maybe she was told not to. Either way, it was bloody mess. Hour into the fray we were creating makeshift defenses out of wreckage and sandbags. Techpriest managed to haul still shooting Stormlord to new defense line with mobile crane. With at least one beast operating, choke point remained properly secured. I purposefully did not use any of my offensive powers, but either way, it impressed commissar enough to warrant a commendation. Since I could deploy shield dozen of meters across defense line, their, ours, whatever, soldiers had clear shooting without a worry. Not even bombs or lascannons could penetrate it, although hour of such sustained damage really started to draw my strength, dropping it for few moments, in order to preserve bulk of psychic pool.

When sun begun to decline, we received report of rouge group coming from west. Another massive attack put another entry point into dismay. Desert Gate was struck with heavy loses after surprise attack. Soon after, artillery begun to shoot at our positions. As if that was not enough, Orbital bombardment at palace begun without warning. Underlords went all out.

As Sun Gate stood unbreached, the other side fell apart. Large forces begun to pour in there. Everybody has been pulled off from outer walls and ordered to regroup at inner walls. Stroke of luck, finally. I was hoping to be overrun by attackers and be pushed back to reach palace, but this sped up things. We didn't need incentives to pack ourselves into Gorgon, but had to wait until everybody evacuated. Sergeant complemented me, taking back his earlier words, beginning to believe I truly was a Godsend to help them. With heavy heart, other soldiers lamented that we shouldn't be fighting our fellow people, but true tyrant, their governor, who everyone believed wasn't rightfully chosen by the Emperor to rule over them. They didn't even care if I was a mutant. They just prayed this whole life of theirs had meaning to glory of the Emperor, not to usurpers. Since my knowledge about whole world was largely sparse, they poured their grieves on me, how miserable their lives became since he rose to power. It stabilized my doubts enough to regain clarity of my mind. It all was cut short once commissar entered.

On our way through imperial gardens and sparse housing areas for workers, sporadic bombardment would land shell somewhere near us. Even in such huge transport, we felt impact of a shell hitting close to threads. Even if not direct, such huge blast threw gorgon upside down, shattered its outer armor and flip, wrecking it. As if it was not enough, giant arches and spires over roads were being slowly brought down on us.

For moment, I lost orientation as hull rolled over on its back. Lots of smoke. Something was burning. Someone was burning. . . But he is not screaming. Ringing in my ear subsides and some half dead guy crawls on top of me just to whisper "help me" before dying. Aside from dizziness, I was perfectly fine. My clothes weren't. Cape on my back was smoking and slightly smoldering from hot debris. Armored jumpsuit I wore was punctured in left side with few pieces of shrapnel. Heated metal burnt my skin until pulled out. Moment of pain brought me back to reality. Entire platoon laid dead inside. I smelt burnt fuel and bodies. Smoke begun to fill cabin.

All hatches have been destroyed and rendered unusable. With my psychic strength I just punched through brittle floor and opened it up enough to get out. Before going out, I nabbed Sergeant's communicator from his forearm. Still



feeling some effects from rough ride, I traced my environs. We were only half way to the mid wall. This was not good. Calling for help wasn't a viable option. You cannot imagine how stupid did it all feel to jump into war just after two days of landing into this mess. There was not time to reminiscence as large volume of fire started to pin me down from walls. Dozens of high caliber bullets begun to shoot me from sun gate direction. Even if my rapid regeneration could heal head wound in matter of days, I really didn't like being shot. Whaddiya know . . .

Lines

5823 - 5828

Lost due to recording data corruption

I hid behind wreckage, looking around. Only few chimeras made it through and drove full ahead to East gate. On the other hand, there were many nice options to take cover from dozens of chimeras to giant rubble stretching through fields. Thinking about how much more fighting waited ahead, I didn't want to use my power. Unfortunately, artillery bombardment intensified. Fortunately, all that was left, was to run like wind and hope for enemies' mistakes. Experienced in such long range fire support I knew what pisses off the most when sniping and used it against them. Short bursts with irregular timing and skewing from cover to cover, helping my agility with psychic augmentation for faster bursts.

Statues, stone railings, walls, obelisks and entire orchards were now at large devastated. In these once fabulous serene fields, craters and ruins littered creeks and flower carpets. I hated to see such wonderful gardens turned to wasteland and promised myself not to let it happen to people.

Running out of shooting range took some time. 30 minutes later, I finally reached some forester's hut near mid wall. Forces in there were sparse since attackers came all from south. From this tower cabin, there was good view over south gate, which was closed and guarded. Heavy weapons team alongside few chimeras on ground and unknown amount of soldiers inside wall. Couldn't sneak around that. I finally managed to conceal myself, and at least somehow infiltrate no man's land.

Anticipating further fighting, I quickly took care of my bodily needs and run to the tower. From there, I spotted movement of ground troops around gate. Some transports directed travel to south gate, leaving large chunks of wall undefended. Gate itself wasn't in any imminent danger so no surprise. From this vintage point I did spot however, side alley leading from nicely concealed side stairs behind protruding tower's overlapping walls, thanks to few soldiers, who just decided to take shortcut and forgot to close doors.

Covering myself with trees and bushes, I managed to crawl just under the wall when everyone was still busy with marching out. Entrance frame in wall was nicely covered by layered and offset doors, masked with trees and ivy. I would miss it, had I not seen someone actually coming out of there. I hid in the bushes not far and waited until everything calmed down.

Stone shaft ended with gate over few steps of stairs and slit gate. Few guardsmen who watched over it on the other side, were at ease. I inferred how



many there were from chatter. It took few minutes of eavesdropping to be completely sure, as soldiers listened to a music channel on their radio. Small square used for storage of some kind of wooden crates on harden earthen floor. Looked more like backyard between tall buildings.

I had to psychically pull leavers from other side and initially lift hinges to make sure they would not screech by opening, then sneak around corner. Trees and bushes obscured most of exit in a way nobody saw me coming in. Looking from between leaves helped me to gather better perspective, but there was not way to get past sentries to walkway towards main street. It was a narrow passage, maybe 4, maybe 5 meters in between tall, rockcrete buildings connected to wall and there was too much distance to cover without any cover, hehe . . . yes . . . I estimated 25-30 meters to get past soldiers. Fortunately, they felt very secure, never expecting a drop from skies, but I cannot discredit great amount of courage to be playing cards and listen to radio while something bombards void shields from orbit.

It was just 10 person squad, but I needed to ensure nobody could report me or whole brigade would come chasing after me. Since there was no need to kill them, I decided to . . . just subdue them.

Walking out from behind corner of wall startled them and scared into reaching for weapons, but I froze them with psychic grip, suspending in motion, but leaving cognitive capabilities and lifted everyone under wall. I let sergeant regain part of motion to be able to speak normally, before warning about consequences of foolish behavior. I felt in their auras deep and dark, mortal fear, so I begun by setting them at ease, assuring I just wanted to pass and they should pretend nobody came through. If he could promise me silence, they would be left unharmed. He couldn't be more cooperative. As I said, I released his grip first so he could order his men to be quiet and shut their gobs. Before leaving, asked for shortcuts to eastern gate.

Inside inner perimeter, parks, gardens, vistas, theaters and all kinds of high service provided everything for the most prominent noble housing estates. Some of the largest buildings were production facilities, and these contained all necessities for closed loop environment. Aristocratic milieu of extravagant lifestyle was amazing to look upon. Mara, being agri world, had very fertile soil supporting most colorful and most rare specimen of flora. Gardens were truly beautiful, expansive and vibrant in colors. For moment I just sat down and rested my fatigue a bit. Some of the more stubborn inhabitants, who did not evacuate into palace bunkers, peeked through majestic golden windows to see solitary, puny mortal trespassing into their realm. All of them . . . so defenseless. Especially with military like those from a while ago. Time however, was running out.

It was already past 19 hours. Sun began to decline and would set in four more. Moreover, bombardment didn't stop. Attacking forces were pushing through. I needed to move on. Running towards palace proper was no easy task. And maneuvering in maze of city, not to get detected, arduous planning effort. In here, random guardsmen were nowhere to be found. Storm troopers roamed street in coherent fire teams and constantly communicating. Detection by one would instantly mean whole garrison hunting me, and I couldn't afford slowing down. But before I entered lion's den, I had to go through walls of palace proper, and that was not easily done even by me. I could just climb up. But hordes of



stationary guards would push me back. Even I could not defend Turbolasers and Basilisk shells infinitely. Regaining strength would force me to hunker down for hour or two, and that was time I did not have. For now there was no aerial assault or extraction, so if Amschel was in governor's chamber to begin with, he was surely still there. Alongside BB.

Few layers of void shield have been already depleted by orbital guns and more and more shells landed on ground. Fortunately it was still beyond mid wall. It seemed however, that underlords were able to bring only one frigate with macrocannon. Another dumb play. Like it wasn't obvious enough this whole offensive was just a sham. And still, 4 hours after everything begun, no orbital cannon or interceptor forces tried to shoot it down.

I found good way through palace serfs's common house. Long corridors running along wall provided shielding from sight. Since it was empty, smooth running bought me a lot of time. But then, first signs of human desperation begun to show. The closer to eastern gate the more bloodshed and barbarism displayed. Dead and torn apart civilian personnel of palace was clearly killed in hasty and brutal ways . . . for fun. This kind of wounds are inflicted by wild beast. Or monsters.

In proximity to the gate I heard voices and screams of innocent lives extinguished in vociferous yells and cursed screams. Mob of street punks playing soldiers tried to show world just how tough and dangerous they were. In midst of bodies and cut limbs, last remaining humanity, drowned in blood. This was indeed uprising of angry people, who didn't know how to direct this ... anger. Random acts of violence was all they known for all their life, and so it became the only means of their expression. I am no one to judge others, but this didn't deserve mercy. Or perhaps in the end, it was . . . When I saw them, it was over in a blink. Armed in led pipes, slug pistols, swords and home made grenades, young and feisty gangsters couldn't even shoot straight. Phase edge cut them down to last one.

Another building, another massacre. Another pocket of mobsters killed. Once I reached premises of eastern gate, scenes of desperation filled my mind. I felt how big lake of souls trembled over presence of dark, grey souls. Focusing my far sight showed me large group of mob breaching vault doors of basement shelters. Thousands of civilians were about to taste madness of war firsthand. It made me take a detour to basements. Men waiting on stock floor didn't like my intrusion and attempted to shoot me. There was no reasoning with gangsters. Everyone have been obsessed with destruction. Something pushed them to the brink of madness, like rabid dogs, beyond help. Even if those were local gangs, it all got out of hand very quickly. I could hear loud screams and fired guns on my way down. First looters dragged women up where I appeared in the exit. They weren't in mood for reasoning. When they tried to silence captives with fists and bullets, I deemed them too far gone and killed everyone. Maybe 50, maybe 100 died. Since I didn't have time to meticulously pursue each of them, I just used my powers to collectively blow their brains out. Whoever remained, scattered in fear . . . just like their victims. Everybody saw me only as mutant freak, even those who I have rescued. After dealing with situation in basement, another set of large shooting called my attention up on the surface.

Small shootout in dining hall left corridors littered with dead. Soldiers lost to thugs by overwhelming numbers, but managed to cut down most of their mob.



Whoever remained threw their rage against me, even if I didn't want to fight. Goons clearly weren't informed about my presence and . . . well, they all died.

Clock on the wall in diner hall showed 19:48 local. I had to hurry as in few minutes heavy support would start storming east gate. Heavy shots from frontal batteries already roared in heavenly screams. It was time to move.

Almost all remaining inner palace forces concentrated in that one place. At least two thousand soldiers mounted on walls and defenses in front. But what's more, double that amount was laying dead in the killing fields running along road from gate to gate. Bloody trail of murder and destruction cobbled with wrecks, burning pits, ruins, craters and rivers of blood. Mostly insurrectionists bodies. Those paid the heaviest price, under unrelenting torrent of fire from walls, accompanied by cohort of Leman Russes. There was no chance in heaven and earth to pass those defenses with a ragtag mob, but it didn't stop dozens of thousands of people to try.

Rockcrete safety land margin in front of wall is just 100 meter in length, but plaza in front of doors was three times that. Road to the gate has already been devastated by heavy ordnance. Wreck of shoddy ramming devices and what looked like Orkish, looted, ramming device already burnt in black hot flames in front of destroyed column of some kind locally created heavy armor. Sure, it might have looked like heavy support, but it wasn't heavy enough. Defenders did not measure their shots, leaving trails of annihilation over civilian buildings, reducing large swats of what reminded factories, to grate grade rubble. After 12 millennia of war, one could think to be jaded already, but I just couldn't not think about things to come later. Still, inexhaustible swarm of desperates relentlessly pushed forward

With help of thousands upon dozen thousand poorly equipped people and some dodgy heavy weapons, uprising's heavy support made its way all to the giant doors, where it finally met its end. Yelling in ferocious blood lust, rebels almost opened champagne. Defending tank formation has been wiped out. Such was the indestructible resolution of their desires . . . until guarding beast showed up.

Giant shouting chants of "Gloria Victis" rose as mob threw all kinds of improvised explosives onto walls. Most missed, some stuck it onto walls instead of fire ports, but some brought legitimate rocket launchers to deliver payloads on the spot. All for nothing. It was after all . . . giant wall of guns and teeth. Even if half of those cannons have been rendered unusable, there was no mercy for attackers. Just one shell of devastator cannons punched holes big enough to swat dozens of people with one shot. Not even ruins provided much cover. But then . . . For moment, big guns on the wall fell silent, up to cheer of the crowd. East Inner Gate started to open. Mob took movement of humongous machinery as sign of victory, shouting even more. From ajar doors, someone saw terrible monster, throwing screeching tantrum all around, infecting whole mob with reality check. As rigged in symphony, whole crowd started to run away in morbid fear. Front wings of transition chamber spread its wings open wide outside, mutilating whoever was incapable of clearing out. From half opened gate, Warhound butchered through carpet of bodies in unstoppable carnage. Once it left lock gate, all batteries resumed fire.

A fucking Warhound . . .

Titan was not in in calculations. There wasn't supposed to be any such



potent engine of war. Once again whole plan was undermined by botched reconnaissance. How could anyone missed a stationed *WARHOUND* is beyond me! It really got out of hand really quickly.

As whole crowd dispersed immediately, I tried to get as close as possible. Last standing building with proper look on entrance was situated dozens meters away from East Inner Square. It provided perfect view on situation, being last structure before empty strip in front of wall. I waited until titan engaged crowd. If anyone would spot me, it would be bad. Like *REAL* bad. Warhound alone wouldn't be a problem, but hundreds of additional large gun emplacements would be too much for now. I needed an opportunity.

All I could do is to wait for another offensive push in hope it would draw attention away. During few minutes of waiting, I tried to scout and map defensive position of wall emplacement with astral sight. Suddenly, few lascannons started to shoot in the sky, as Warhound attempted to turn back. Few flying crafts loaded with melta bombs performed suicidal run to take Warhound down. Unfortunately only two managed to hit the beast. Few hit ground and walls, followed by smoldering wrecks of their destroyed companions.

Maybe it wasn't destroyed but for short time vulnerable. As soon as it lost void shields another weave of charging mob attacked. Running as fast as possible, behind leading gorgon transports, thousands of people rushed at defenses wielding little more than pistols, knives and rifles. Some of them picked up what dead left behind. They were desperate to not to back down. And so was Warhound. It regained control and begun to shoot at the advancing rebels. Vulcan megabolters ripped through enemy. It was a fucking bloodbath. Whatever heavy equipment rebels had, it wasn't good enough to bring titan down. Soon, attack lost it's momentum again. This was it. If that thing was not brought down, no amount of population would suffice to win.

I did not hesitate to call upon my psychic might. No point in holding back anymore. To properly fire what you know as warp lance, I had to see my target and be still for few seconds to focus. Taking Warhound head on . . . is , well . . . very impractical. But not impossible.

I got out of the window and found a place behind trees. As giant hunk of metal stepped out into middle of killing field, I manifested my shield. Sudden aetheric lightning discharge around me drawn a lot of attention. Some of emplacements started to shoot immediately. Warhound turned to me and ramp up its rotary cannons. Even though still behind behind cover I felt shivers of excitement shaking my body. It was quite a few centuries I was challenged in this way.

It turned its body directly towards me but kept distance. As soon as I walked out in the open, illuminating shield to point of glow, it stared to flood my position with shells. At the same time, some lascannon rounds fired into its side, but it was too little to even take down one void shield. Those were long and agonizing moments. Upkeeping my shield when everything shoots at me is helluva taxing. Fortunately, I managed to concentrate mold of energy in 6 seconds to summoned warp lance strong enough.

Sudden discharge of aetheric power sent a shrieking screech in immaterium, deafening all souls for a brief time. As lance begun to materialize, wreckage got pulled behind it, towards Warhound. Golden glow of energetic ray



illuminated plaza more sunlight could. Whatever was near at point of impact - Chimeras, Leman Russes and remains of combatants, scattered around blast point like toys. Shockwave quenched any remaining fire in vicinity. Clouds of dust first rose up and faded with shock wave. Whoever was caught in radius, was torn to pieces. Tail of smoldering ground blazed with molten rock. Remaining defenders in trench bunkers . . . well, they have been severely disoriented. Only small crater marked spot where titan stood moment before.

With enough power to shatter its hull, the concussive force was strong enough to smite its hull into the opposing buildings, bulldozing its surrounding to ground. Thank Emperor it did not blow up. That stunt took a lot of strength out of me, and had it gone critical, my shield could not save me. My body was pump with adrenaline and still shaking with excitement. I hadn't have such occasion since facing off renegade legions on Metel II. I admit, it was fun to take down a Warhound, but still, I had to duck for cover in buildings to regenerate some powers.

Moment later, new wave of suicide maniacs, hiding behind ruined housing complexes, run into direct fire. Last platoons of trench defenders outside walls began to be overrun by sheer amount of assailants. Although defenses were now cut by half, they still fought on. Wall's perimeter looked more like smoking pots in weave basket. Fire ports were emptying, heavy guns nearly all died out, last call of the command had bunker defenders stand their ground to the last.

A minute did not pass since struggling mob closed distance to gate yet again, when I heard loud thump somewhere in the skies. I even peaked out of basement's window to see what was going on. Artillery piece fired somewhere out there, but it's screeching bullet could be heard even from my position. Few seconds later battlefield turned into a firestorm. Promethium bomb decimated friend and foe alike. In unholy screams and yelling for help, both defenders and attackers burned away. This one shell put a hold to the advance. Next few minutes brought smell of wasted and charred flesh. All chemical compounds only added to intensity. People were burned alive. Small devices melted in heat. Everything on plaza, in front of gate, was consumed by white flame. I have seen such scene too many times before. . . . and heard those screams too many times . . . This was not a war anymore. It was not an insurrectionist attack. This wasn't a setup, phony coup or even an honest killing. This was just fucking dumb. Time and time again, defenders just held back on their weapons, which could decimate whole damn attacking forces in one sweep. Roll cohort of hellhounds outside and it would be over in an instant . . . but then, it wasn't a real war.

When smoke cleared and greatest fire died out, some less damaged folks were just crawling away. Shooting stopped from both sides. Maybe garrison captain finally saw what kind of sick asshole his governor is. Chemical bombing to decimate enemy no matter the cost of who gets caught in crossfire. Even wall has been partially splashed with promethium, flushing out nearest weapon nests. Might have been that commander was killed in that attack. Whatever the case, there wasn't much left of any side. Militarum was cut at least by 3/4, and some reinforcement were called in. Common people on the other hand were devastated. Pockets of fighters tried to get back themselves on feet and run away, but ceasefire quickly subsided.

Barrage of shells covered no man's land yet again. Grenades, mortars, cannons scourged already dead ground. Mutilated bodies thorn apart even more.



Resistance had very few heavy weapons left, but more folks came to help them from other sides as well. Whoever broke through Sun Gate came to reinforce attack on East Gate. Some private bodyguards of nobility helped those still alive to leave dead zone. Three hundred meter of no man's land in front of gate was now a living hell to pass through. It seemed hopeless.

I was still tired but if I would not help them, then who . . .

I think I just got caught up in momentum. Plan was to conserve my strength for final showdown, but as long as gate remained closed it wouldn't even happen. It took few moments of weighing my options, but it seemed that charge through gate remained only option. Even if I was able to just jump over the walls, or straight fly over them, whole garrison inside waited for me with all weapons ready to fire.

Before whole offense fell apart, I run towards remaining fighters to advise them what I was about to do. They, of course, wouldn't believe anybody was able to just destroy gate, much less a mutant on their own. Still, I promised them to open door, but they had to be ready to follow through. Techpriest seemed to find my data logs from wanted list and decide that my psychic abilities have more chances of success than another charge.

Hiding in rubble and smoke, I came as close to edge of empty strip, which now looked like planet after exterminatus. Carpet of bodies near the door looked like sick tribute and sacrifice to Slaanesh. Well . . . because it was, but . . .

At first, no one paid attention to me, but I was spotted just few steps out of cover. Some sudden movement of lights on wall. Soldiers running on top. Suddenly all weapons aimed at me. Time came to take matters into my own hands. For starters, small wreckage and rubble made excellent projectiles. Without shielding, heavy weapon emplacements were easy target. After few minutes every scary major gun was silenced. Big cannons were now even for both sides, but siege forces had more numbers. Some defectors joined rebels. Gate was the only obstacle that remained.

Inner Eastern Gate was in fact winged, repurposed, old Manufactorum door. Punching through it would be extremely inadvisable. 30 meter tall, 3 meter thick, segmented adamantium alloy was final measure to ensure safety of most wealthy. More probable to get through ceramite reinforced rockcrete walls.

One thing I could do was to rip off the damned door off its socket. I really tried to not overspend my strength, as I was still in fatigue, and needed to remain in power to face what was behind these gates, but . . . what could open them anyway.

Orbital bombardment stopped some time ago, I didn't even notice when. Support machinery was gone, one techpriest we had, fell back to help repair whatever could be field repaired in such short time. Within ruins, uprising looked at me in wonder, awe and expectations. I loathed to think just how much psychic power it will cost to open that gate on my own. That or running away.

I needed to get through . . . I had the duty to help these folks overthrow tyrant if anything else. Betty was waiting, I told myself.

Whatever weapons remained shooting, were only handheld guns of soldiers on the walls. Few rifles from other side tried to cover me, up to my amusement. Guys probably didn't understand why I laughed at their "support". I summoned my shield and walked right in front of gate. For a time, everything went quiet.



Commanding officer was trying to convey information to me from governor Amschel, that he would welcome my help in destroying the unfaithful to the Emperor, rabble that dares to challenge his divine will. And in return he would offer me his services. Not that anyone believed this would convince me. I hope. Even if the man himself would show up, the answer would be the same. Silence.

With major chunk of my psychic pool gone, it was really hard to conjure enough strength. Waning power made me slip my grip on the machinery. Ripping door of its mechanism would be easier than just powering through it. Screeches of twisted steel and overpowered gears accompanied by sparks, rumbles and crushing moaning of reinforced hydraulic systems, bit by bit, allowed me to release monstrous door.

At first it was only jerking . . . resisting, but in few next seconds, machinery alloys gave away. In spectacular display of might, or clumsiness, right wing smashed in great slam into opposite wall of lock chamber, carving chunks of wall out of structure and fell right at my feet. Don't ask why I didn't push it in. Crowd behind me bellowed at once and with new vigor, stormed now opened path. Garrison opened fire, but concentrated all guns on me. Despite everything, there was still enough power to keep shield on. Not even lascannons could penetrate that. Fortunately, other side of lock gate was already giving in as well.

I almost blacked out, and fell on ground. I sat under ripped door to rest. This extreme show of might . . . forced me recuperate my energy . . . from fallen souls. Had I not drawn from their spirits, I would surely fry myself later. It is my . . . power and curse . . . to be able to leech off collective spirit power of surrounding souls. 99 % doesn't even realize it exists and in most cases, it doesn't hurt anyone. This time, well . . . lets just say exhaustion was so extensive, I needed ethereal energy to mend some of astral damage.

A: No, back then, it was . . . deliberate decision. This one was just scooping up minuscule amount of this energy from soul residue in vicinity.

A: Under normal circumstance, there would be no need for such expenditure of my strength in first place.

A: Under NORMAL circumstances, you do not need to destroy titan grade resistant citadel by your own damn self.

Like water through dam, invading combatants poured inside premises of fortress. It was still few paces into the palace itself though. As soon as we breached perimeter, one last line of defense opened fire at anything that moved. It was not as vicious as Warhound but heavy losses on people's side made it difficult to advance. At least half of their numbers were already dead.

Only I could remain at front, defending heavy weapons with shield and somehow pushing front line just by crossing fire nests, which forced defenders to fall back. Even so, our advance seemed very slow. In order to not deplete myself from remaining powers, I had to revert to simple, physical means of standard weapons. Once people run over walls and took over those positions, it suddenly became much easier to return fire. Little by little, guardsmen lost ground.



When we came near palace proper, the fire wall became impenetrable. Numerous weapon systems opened fire from higher levels. Scavenged and looted tanks of already conquered defenders piloted by untrained personnel were no match for backed-to-the-wall defenses. Spire suddenly turned into fire spitting dragon, disregarding destruction of surrounding homes.

I had to go alone utilizing my quickness. Severely limited at that point, but it had to be enough. Using trenches, bunkers and whatever remained from streets, I looked for a way into spire. Judging all possible ways, there was only one easily reached entrance, guarded by few heavy bolters.

With all remaining strength, I run through hellfire. Few times explosions almost kicked me off my feet. Fortunately, military posts and nests between noble mansions were non existent. Long roads between tall buildings and large parks offered a lot of room for hiding. This was living layer of the most rich. Streets weren't just rockcrete field, but a white marble stone roads upon which most beautiful forms of art decorated by huge gems, wide avenues and sidewalks. Almost mystical in nature, golden shrines and arches high above streets matched cathedrals by size. Hellhammer and detachment of chimera transports were waiting in the risen bunker emplacements, overlooking lower fields. Finally, main road to palace from West side was in reach. Measuring last distance to the entrance, my eyes became watery from all the smoke in the air. 50, maybe 70, meters and I would breach perimeter, right into the palace. Hope to see BB gave me a surge of strength. It was now now or never.

Without stopping, I run full throttle these last paces and rammed everyone to side. Huge amount of ordnance could not lock onto my speeding figure, spreading destruction over the trail behind me. Guardsmen who tried to stop me couldn't aim for shit, wasting all of precious ammo into ground. Only one real chance, when I run uphill of the emplacements, was wasted into air. Smaller entrance to palace for military personnel was defended by sandbags and heavy bolters. I conjured small, directed shield to deflect these low caliber weapons. It took 2, maybe 3 seconds to reach weapon nest. No one could stop me now. Charge through that door left everyone scattered and running for their lives. With shield up, I rammed into the wall with a psionic blast, ripping whole portal open, showering with debris unfortunate souls standing against opposite side of corridor. And slamming with impetus into the wall myself.

I was inside. No more artillery or turbolasers shooting at me, but with all strength I had remaining it was just enough to walk. It didn't take long till multiple las shots lighted up chambers. Not being in shape to fight, I quickly had to run away, ramming through few doors on the way. Once I reached into main walkway, hostilities suddenly ended. It looked like they were scared. Mostly non combatant staff. In attempt to gather my breath, I threw myself behind large planters under wall, into cavity between floor and underbasement. Fortunately nobody saw me.

Large vaults, decorated with paintings and crystal fixtures, shone bright, white light over dark crimson carpets on marble floors. Statues in walled portals. Walls covered with pretty, wooden panelings, decorated with thousands of flowers. Big and spacious. Luxurious chairs, golden tableware, silver vases and furniture crafted of wood infused with faint, luminous veins. Faux glass windows shone in vivid brightness, mimicking sun light so deep, under mile of rockcrete even in evening. Despite battle still raging outside, I tried to savor this moment,



taking my time until another hunting party searched for me. Two more patrols passed me, never noticing how I hid inside shrubs. Ten minutes sufficed to regain my breath. It was time to climb spire.

On bottom levels, resistance remained stiff, with barricades and tarantula sentry guns guarding most frequented corridors. Since it looked like this spire has been build with standard layout of main structure, I decided to take my chances with path I could know, through side walkways. Unfortunately, side chambers were built in maze I couldn't navigate and had to push through main transport lines. It became increasingly hard to put up any kind of shield for me, which made me realize just how stupid was my decision. This relentless pushing up however, resulted in less and less resistance on my way.

Whatever guardsmen were left inside either tried not to shoot anything or were too scared to face me. I heard many places with civilian people screaming in panic inside distant rooms. Defenses seemed to leave me alone. I mostly had clear path, which was a bit of luck on my side. It helped me to rest on the way. And it was what I needed indeed. Governor's Palace was almost 2 kilometer up. A lot of climbing, but fortunately I knew my way around imperial spires and just had to search for supply transport platforms.

First clock I found showed 21 hours local. Sun was in decline, in one more hour it would set. Sporadic skirmishes lost on intensity as I reached upper levels. Every time I tried to tell squads of guardsmen that I wasn't there to fight them and some squads just gave up and run away. By time I reached to Minstorum chambers, no one even bothered to fight me anymore. Those who couldn't run just let me pass in exchange for their lives. I made clear that I would not fight who did not attack me. Despite lack of hard resistance, soldiers still had huge problems with accepting chasm of power between us, spitting and throwing names on me all around. Some were so desperate due to helplessness they broke in tears in front of me, after display of my power. At that time I still didn't know whole subsector had very few psyker instances through thousands of years, leaving people woefully unprepared for such fights.

My way into highest levels laid in industrial elevator. Munition boxes and supply crates were loaded to reach upper levels. Ammo storage level had 3 lifts operating, but only one still on deck. As I said, there was no hard resistance, but soldiers tried to stop me by closing bulk gates and corridors, forcing me to expend even more energy than fighting. Upon reaching departure platforms officers just hissed at me, spitting venom at my feet, but complied with my demands, trying to cover their shaking hands with tough words. Even tough hundreds already let me pass, commander ordered to gun me down before I could enter . . . leaving me no choice but to defend. 13 men will never return to their families due to his stubbornness. Or perhaps a call of duty. Call it whatever you want.

Corpses laying around bled onto white ceramite tiling. Serfs who were left, begged not to kill them, few soldiers left finally dropped their guns and tough attitudes. At that point they just wanted this nightmare to end. Just like me.

After hours of in fighting, I couldn't remember why we did in the first place. Each step forward made me feel like any of my goals just run away in distance. Thoughts of BB kept me going on. I needed to at least see her. Even if she wasn't my destiny after all, it was all I cared for, no matter who was it or what was it. Even so, my body barely moved. Both psychic and physical exhaustion were destroying me. I could already feel warpfire in my hands, digesting them at all



planes of existence in searing pain.

At the end of corridor I found industrial lift for supplies to the upper segments. Shaft was very tall. Flickering light at its end, who knows how far above, was all to see in darkness. Crates at center served as my sitting spot, while it took it's sweet time to reach the top. I was on my way to the luxury suites of governor's most trusted sidekicks.

Shaft turned from closed, to girder supported near edge of plate, where giant, supporting pillars hoisted governor's palace on the top. Near the end, platform slowed down to softly reach locking mechanism. I could see whole skyline of Elkor.

Hive city stretched from side to side, dwarfed only by Guin Mountains. In distance, Rivus flowing through city glittered with orange sun on its surface. Clouds dispersed due to orbital bombarding, showing water blue sky through dust clouds. Vast flatland covered with amalgamation of machinery and housing, stretched along river in almost indefinite length. Housing spires didn't seem so large from there. Capital city as it might be, remained fairly low rise for imperial world. In distance, space port housed three large freighters. All aerial activity has been suspended due to orbital bombardment. Even chimneys of manufacturing plants didn't fume. In evening sun, skyscrapers shone with declining orange over their gray rockcrete. One minute was enough to calm my mind.

Supply road, with a wide walkway over grass field with trees and houses, stretched over rim. On the left, giant chasm, city and smoke. On the right, giant main column and little park . . . Instead of rain of fire I was met with silence. In middle of path, something resembling a checkpoint has been built from barricades, manned by meanest looking folks I seen on the planet. On the point stood commander in plated commissar uniform, which was obviously custom job. All the eagles, skulls and golden arabesques on the plates, clearly not a standard issue. Very calm and very ominous, looked at me with unflinching gaze. Dozens of defenders were nervously glancing at me and him, with fingers on triggers. I stood on the elevator for a while, waiting for their move. Two hastily cobbled cannon emplacements, four heavy weapons team, chimera and what looked like whole platoon defended very entrance to high ground. The only way to residential areas was through main road. With doze of disbelief, I walked out to center of walkway in total silence, stopping just meters before their "checkpoint".

With last vestiges of strength, my shield warped air with wispy, crystalline lattice in much less blaze than usual. Closing my eyes I could hear battle in the distance and cool breeze sweeping gently over my body through numerous holes in that clothing. Once I decided to take step forward, the commissar shot plasma pistol at me. It would hit dead center in the head if not for shield. Up to everyone surprise I dropped that shield. Truth is, I was too damn tired to keep it up. For a moment I even thought about actually dying. Actually preferable to pain still waiting at me. Had he shot another time, I . . . don't know . . . My arms were already burned from constant use of psychic energy. Even wearing these gloves was becoming painful at this point. My body begun to break down. It had to end quickly or my organism would just shut down on its own.

No one followed his attack. In contrast, he lowered his weapon and gently stepped aside, still proudly facing city. Without much thinking, I just begun to walk through their line. Looking back at this whole stage it must have been pitiful to look at me in that state. I never actually thought to watch any vids from that



day.

Nobody eyed or looked at me. Like I wasn't even there. Air. None of them, who I would call professional warmongers, flinched or moved a muscle. As I was passing him, the weird feeling came into my mind. Something I could not pinpoint. I dared not to look at him, but he was standing strong and tall. I felt his aura. He was letting me go for a purpose. In hope. All of their auric fields were aligned on this . . . They hoped . . .

Walking through golden streets of greatest estate Mara had to offer, a serene tranquility overcame me in sight of declining sun. Last warm rays of sunlight grazed me as I traveled opulent avenues. Built around rim, luxury suites was home to most fanatic followers. Tall, white towers, ingrained with authentic silver veins in their stone. Gold statues over gold arches, chapels lit with thousands of candles, surrounded by flower carpets in midst of park, so high above ground. From this place, grand view of the hive city twinkled in horizon. Mysterious trees with glowing veins and leaves adored this sacred place with grace. Large plaza, big enough to conduct religious procession surrounded by tall houses of fantastic décor, rivaling those of cathedrals.

All of the temporary emplacements and guards closely watched me. They were not numerous, but as elite forces, very dangerous to me in current state. Fortunately, nobody seemed hostile to me. Upon reaching the main column connecting residential area with governor's chambers, I was met with another obstacle, another gate. Although not so tough as previous, it was still a defensive one.

It made me angry. In moment of rage I disturbed silence of this magic place, shouting on the door few curses. With a quick glance around me, I saw how everyone turned towards me in anticipation, lowering weapons. Commissar in distance watched me carefully.

I was done with appearances, it didn't matter anymore. I took off my hood, whatever remained of cape and helmet, which was already damaged and not working properly. Throwing them around, I mustered one last push to open gate on my own. Fortunately, mechanisms were not so robust and gave up easily, so in few seconds they relented, but opened only half wide. This was the best I could do, combining raw power of my body and remaining psionic strength.

Blood and sweat garnished my cute face, ponytail was in shambles as the hair binding let go somewhere near second gate. If anything, I now reminded of Russ. Rough and bloody visage of anger. Except he didn't tire so easily. If at all. And was taller. And blonde. And . . . whatever.

Empty inside. Figures. No overconfident asshole would think that anyone could breach into governors inner sanctum. Gold decorated interior was indeed the pinnacle of what Imperium had to offer for the most egotistic kings and queens usurping power from Emperor. Amount of art and eloquent ornament were indeed worthy of being called Imperial Palace. I remembered Palace of Terra instantly and understood the love of pomp and splendor. It took me few minutes to climb staircases to upper levels. Unending, thousands of steps lifted almost 100 meter up around main shaft of main spiral column. Few people dared to look out of windows and doors of dozen floors. This is where standard layout ended. Upper segment has been built in custom way.

This was level of Central Command, a military outpost for immediate and



fast information flow. Being built as first line of defense, corridors have been angled and twisted to provide shooting galleries. I met only one squad trying to resist. Instead of fighting, all it took to make them scatter was to disarm them. After pulling their weapons with telekinesis out their of hands, sergeant summarized to his men "it's not worth it, boys" and squad run away. All shutters been closed. Any gate shut. Fortunately, bending few bars was still easy. I had to walk through whole radius of level to reach stairs leading to palace. Few windows allowed to take look at whole valley. It seemed like vast farmlands outside city limit stretched endlessly into horizon

I finally arrived to government residency. Massive doors remained open. Statues of sororitas and golden cherubs greeted everyone. It seemed like joke to travel yet again across whole plate. At least views made it all worth it.

Only one thing did not match its environs - the last post of guards in makeshift barricade at the end of this massive corridor, nesting under bottom of the staircase.

Stillness of this place was broken only by my cuffed boots. I tried not to be loud and took in this moment. It was so peaceful and quiescent, blissful silence helped me to relax. Almost forgot about world whatsoever.

Way to the imperial stairs, leading to Governor's living quarters, were at the end of two rows of long colonnade dividing passage into three pathways. Humongous galleries connected gardens with entry to governing chambers, in which brilliant marble stone, in long arches of fan vaults with glass slit in the roof, shone as lit gems in the evening sky. Looking up, the magnificent capitals in form of imperial eagles connected wings to create yet another walkway in the clerestory, all built upon skull astragals. Caryatid forms of imperial heroines connected curvous shapes into one harmonious display. Each one unique and individual character with ever intimidating presence, in which most graceful sororitas appeared. Sculpted in quartz crystals, radiant sun illuminated matriarchal figures in shimmering light, dresses with gold lacing accents on their clothes glossing vividly.

On the very front stood magnificent visage of Canoness Mara who helped to rip savage land out of alien hands. Thick outer walls allowed triforium chapels to host marvelous images of monumental battles and Emperor's victories over hostile lands adorned with eagle corbels underneath. Vivid colors over relief work displayed unimaginable power he possessed over mind and body. Stained glass in rosette windows spread gorgeous light patterns in interior and myself. Even if those were fau windows with artificial induced light, it was done in way nobody could spot difference with natural light. In litany of playful colors, gargantuan clear windows and wooden doors brought forth serene symphony of warmth. Golden arabesques adorning every window and tympanum served as trimming for remarkable paintings of Imperium's great heroes. Near vintage points, surrounded by folding screens, small places with braziers, sofas and tables. Accented pilasters arching away turning into pedestals for mighty sculptures of knights, swarmed on ground by host of flowers and trellises. What was not covered in paint, giant sculpture of war covered wall evenly to the highest ceiling. Great artisan masterpieces of paint and sculpture adorned whole length of this corridor. Multiple massive doors, embedded in deep portals were now shut.

Resting places on each side of passage, divided giant collection of artful armor pieces. Magnificent chairs and tables laid with silver and gold thread,



hyperweave cloth, golden tableware in company of gem decorated chalices, blue ceramite pottery and vases painted with white floral patterns. Tribunes donning colorful drapery, built into terraces and balconies at the feet of giant columns, in grand number were furnished into resting vistas. Each connected via mezzanine blossoming with pergolas and garlands. Each flower full and vibrant, spread sweet smell of summer into air. White marble stone path, covered with red carpet plaited red and crimson, damask pattern, trimming down into mosaic compositions at sides ingrained with visible gold veins into it's beautiful texture. Each path of the Viatrium could host a parade on its own. Main walkway however, was wide and tall enough like basilica. That place was one of the most beautiful places I ever have visited, on par with the palace of Ultramar.

Corridor ended in row of majestic windows over row of doors. As I was walking closer and closer, few of soldiers decided to make a move and closed all of them. It was hilarious attempt. I tried to open them normally, but locking mechanism denied me entry because I didn't have clereance. One solid kick removed them from hinged frame and sent flying to the ground. Tall structure of staircase was the only way, except for inactive elevator, to reach upper tiers. To get onto them though, I had to go through blockade in front of me. Some of them were already welcoming death. I could see it via shaking hands and clenched teeth. One even fully ducked behind barrier and no one could blame him. All their auras displayed anxiety and desire to live.

I was very serene now, but kept stone face. My bloodied face, from behind thick laurel of hair and glowing eyes must have surely made some impact in light rays falling at me from stair windows, but not as much as lightning jolts sporadically spurring out from my field. Through open vox channel came order to gun me down, but no one reacted. I asked them to move aside, letting me through. After moment of thinking, their colonel got up behind barricade and move to side, soldiers left giant stairs open. And they were huge indeed, maybe 10 meters wide. The split on the opposite side of spiral joined again in never ending cascade of steps interwoven with giant drapery between stained glass.

In meantime of climbing stairs there was all time in the world to think about what I've done just to find one person, who I didn't even know. Or even if it was a person after all. How much I just rushed to front without thinking. I knew that slimy bastard had to have ace up his sleeve. Otherwise it wouldn't be so easy. Nagging feeling of uncertainty that would put me into unpleasant position of choosing rebellion, BB or his head. In that case which one would be more important. Genuine despair flew through me for a second. I had to put myself together. Showing any weakness, mental or physical would result in my end.

As I climbed first level, Some of the servants and soldiers didn't look frightened but excited. Crowds of staff cluttered in vast corridors, packed to the brim like front line rations, almost coming forth to watch me. Even Ogryns stood patiently, not uttering a word. All soldiers just stepped aside, letting me through to upper level. To keep appearances, I still wore faint lightning crown around my aura. Nothing more than cheap gimmick, but there was nobody who would know it. I have not felt any psyker anywhere since arrival.

On next floor, more people filled corridors. Those looked like more wealthy merchants guarded by more specialist troops. Few squinted eyes in disbelief, few broke dead silence with light gossip.

Climbing next floor, where most of palace's workers run utilities, and main



guest housing, it started to resemble posh, luxurious standards one expected from such place. While nobility barely appeared out from their doors, staff walked out to watch and whisper.

Fourth floor, where governor had his offices, library, council room, bath house, kitchen and more opulent apartments for most notable guest, was stationed by platoons of heavy weapons. In main corridor, officers built makeshift defenses from steel plates. Most of them just readied their guns to shoot, glancing with hate towards me. Within their collective thoughts, fear of abandonment fed their despair, but they as well let me pass in silence.

On the top floor, his living quarters, and every leisure one could imagine, all elite soldiers who were unassigned, gathered to form last stand line. Top of the staircase had proper barricades built out of field adamantium plates with fire ports full of lasguns staking out. their commander, storm trooper colonel asked what was I here for, in reality. In truth, I myself didn't know anymore . . . but answered that . . . “I have been sent to stop madness of this world”. With confusion, mixed with anxiety, he whispered to few of his men and cleric. After minute of hectic, humming exchange, ordered to let me pass, but warned me that they are prepared to give their lives if I started something stupid. He told me that if I wanted to meet governor, he dines in ball hall. From three corridors, splitting into cardinal directions, he pointed towards the one straight ahead from stair. Workers of noble houses, clearly in much better shape then staff, crowded corridors, sitting on sofas, chairs, floor and tables shyly eyeing me as I approached. Some of them would pass as nobles themselves.

Civilian personnel surreptitiously gazed at my steps, delicately whispering to each other, softly enough to keep deep silence. Vast corridors of arcade filaments, dwarfed by amount of tall windows letting through enough light to see all intricate details of the stucco ceiling overflowing with sculptures of saints. On the ground however, mass of people contrasted golden artworks, paintings and flower garlands stretching whole length of floor. Some of those plants grew so long, they partially covered ceiling. Crystalline tiles of azure hue glow, with blue and gold veins infused in whatever compound composed floor, lit from underneath like gems.

To everybody, my presence was only omen of carnage, yet all gazed upon me with expectations. Some people looked at my glowing eyes with curiosity. Everyone else with contempt. I suspect my blue hair was something more to be concerned with.

Before I would arrive at main attraction, at the end of long corridor, there were multiple other doors to check. I had to be very careful and watchful. My reaction time was downed by significant margin, any mistake could prove fatal.

Nearest one, was on the left. In there, few couples in extravagant clothing were sitting like wired to landmine. After first glance, no one dared to look at me. Big, spacious chamber resembling large hearing hall hosted dozens of noble figures in company of their serfs and pets. Tables filled with dishes. Atmosphere filled with uncertainty. Only three people between them remained calm and strong.

Next to entrance stood cart with golden tableware and all kinds of glasses. I took a look into one of gold plates to see how I looked like. My image was in shambles now, really looking like from a war zone. Blood on my forehead, cheeks



and hair, chaotically stranded in every direction, let loose out of hair binder. Front fringe clumped together by sweat and blood. I just took golden cloth napkin next to spoons and tied my hair behind head. Took some of ice cubes from buckets, melted them in glass with help of pyrokinesis, to at least scrub most of dirt on my face and used silk tablecloth to wipe it. All in total silence. Nobody said a word due to tension in the air. It felt wrong. At that time I really didn't know what I was doing. It felt so out of place I started to wonder if it was even real. Ridiculous. We were in middle of all out war, and here . . . nobody tried to throw a potato at me. From one side, I felt out of place, in over my head, but on the other . . . like it were my last moments of a dream.

Since it wasn't a fashion show, I had to settle for bare minimum, spending just couple of seconds. My hands burning with pain. By now, almost charred and melting away. Being perpetual would heal this pain in few days, but now it hellishly hurt just to use my hands at all. Muscles, already half gone, barely responded to my commands, forcing me to augment movement telekinesis to make them move properly. After years of such pain, it ceases to be torture. Now, it was just a annoying pain. I didn't even want to look at this mess. Thanks to Hatshepsut and her power gloves, it was bearable to continue using them though.

A: Yes, her. One of a kind female Necron Lord. Somewhat resembling human female, but still . . . necronized. Actually hard to imagine. It was just five centuries ago, near galactic core.

A: Nope, she dead for good this time.

A: No. This is a story for another time.

A: You want me to continue, or jump across random events?

A: All in time, other wise you wouldn't understand why.

A: He already knows. If it is such important, ask him after session.

Next room, on right, was filled with another set of nobles. Room readied for small scale parties. Scene, musical instruments, liquor bar, dancing floor and dozen of tables already filled with plates. I just took a look inside, to understand this was not what I looked for. Nothing to see there.

Third room, again on the left, had some very exotic military equipment in it. Bolt rifles and plasma guns, melta guns and . . . prayer books. This looked like Sororitas gear. Filled up whole room almost obstructing practice range. Soldiers guarding this chamber have stood back, informing me that governor is at the end of corridor.

Near next room, nervous whispers of tentative future slammed lots of adjective onto my being as I lurked around corner. Scarred about their wigs, nobles were very talkative. As soon as I showed in door frame, all activities stopped. Few ladies in there prayed to the Emperor that I would disperse into thin air, vanishing off their sacred ground of backstabbing and skulduggery proxy wars. Inside of course. Her aura split venomous hatred, spiking me with gaze of murder.



one good memory on this planet. And I held on to it. It helped me to calm down, regaining a moment of clarity. Perhaps hope.

After my rise from throne, which felt like titanic effort, I started to ask around about current chain of command, siege status and army forces. I Swept broken pieces, as well as thrash on the floor, to back of the ball room and cleared floor from litter with remaining power. Staff brought new, smaller tables in, so we had a planning table. Not yet officially, but crowd had already accepted me as authority. In few moments, elders and senior nobility have acknowledged me as new power, but with my third eye I could see civil war coming. I felt . . . well . . . You know there is yet another source of my feelings. It dripped some of this insight into me, cautioning me against conspiracy holding world in its clutches.

With all ruffraff emptied and crammed into surrounding rooms, I could begin to setup new command. As first decree, ceasing hostilities was a priority. We announced that the uprising was successful and we, the people, overthrew Amschel Martens. In following announcement, it was proclaimed that former governor was not in palace at the time and escaped. Notable noblewoman has voiced support for our cause on the feed. I cannot remember her name.

Being head authority was one thing. Public appearance, entirely different. Due to my . . . peculiar situation and looks I had to appoint someone in the room. Everyone has been ordered to take off their helmets and head appendages. Looking into everyone's eyes, I finally found a candidate. Grew up on Hephaestus Capital World, rose up in ranks of Astra Militarum to become Colonel. Commander of Tempestus Scions soldiers stationed on Mara, James Maroo, the same man who held defensive line atop stairs, became my spokesman and second in command. Although no one said a word, there was a sigh of relief on side of common folk and great dissonance in the other camp. More than anything, I was astonished how easy it was to impose this new chain. It seemed like everyone was happy that something has moved on. Or they were too damn scared. Either way, nobody voiced objections.

Soldiers were happy and eager to help setup new regime. In meantime, workers brought new servings to the table. Being tired and hungry, I welcomed another warm meal on my plate. In hour, corridor begun to be noisy. By midnight tension faded and everyone could freely talk again. From room with locked away snobs, I chosen arbitrarily some fancy, posh fella with a mustache to be present. I might have hit the jackpot. In process of setting up cabinet he confessed to be Marcus de Estana, one of the most politically important person on the planet. Eager adversary of Amschel and his companions. As well as richest person in whole subsector.

Prepared for the show, I took some of boot lickers, new regent and old guy to get news casters ready for the crowds at ground levels. Traversing spire again filled me with dread. I barely could walk, to the point of considering not going at all.

After serfs took care of my tattered visage, we were on our way down. Waiting in in front of defense line was the same man who shot at me at the elevator. Commissar Frederick Olsmo. I felt something within him from the very beginning. This time with wrapped scarf over lower chin as night grew cold. He didn't talk much if at all, but his presence alone was sufficient to put everyone in line, invoking silence and discipline.



Frederick greeted me by bowing head, putting hand over heart and resound "good evening". He wasn't one to beat around the bush, asking me if I even was in shape to travel anywhere, but I just walked past him, assuming his intentions weren't all that pure. After all, he had to part of plan, just letting be through park. It introduced tension in the air. Before I took first step, he reminded me there was elevator waiting for me.

Well . . . it made me feel stupid, but reluctantly said to lead me there. We turned right, into darker corridor without windows. With him on the lead, everyone else quieted down. Doors at the end led to what looked like arrival lobby, with a female servitor sitting behind extravagant desk. With light dimmed out, glowing floor took on intensity, capturing my attention. That is where he explained how it was build with quartz crystal, infused by melting gold into its crevices.

Elevator has been built with magnetic engines, eliminating any moving machinery. Quiet and fast. Anti-gravity generator eliminated accelerating forces. Being lavish platform, there were few sofas under walls helping me rest. Just three minutes to travel to the bottom. There, we met head priestess Tela in company of her acolytes waiting among detachment of soldiers. She couldn't believe I was chosen as new governor and sought reasoning in Frederick, who simply said such was the will of the Emperor. This didn't bode well in her, who thought she had monopoly on holy visions. With little regard to her words, I opted to walk around her, towards end of Main corridor. Her anger only intensified, aura contracted in hate, shouting proclamation that my presence is only a sign of impending doom, bringing omen of destruction. Someone behind tried to reason with her, but she wouldn't calm down. We heard her screams as far as half the way.

Rows of soldiers saluting us smiled and chuckled listening to her tantrum. From time to time Olsmo looked back to me, checking if I still walked on. He came to me, being ready to pick me if I fell. Assured me that he wasn't my enemy, asking if I held a grudge about what transpired before. To me it didn't matter, as I never given it a thought before. He said it relieved him to know we were starting on neutral ground.

Right before we exited through front gate, he expressed his personal gratitude of freeing him from servitude to Amschel, but answers had to wait. He assured me that he had my back and asked to believe in him, which he would return with results. At snap of fingers one of storm troopers waiting in door passed it to him item, which he than presented to me. What remained of my mask. In this moment of theatrics, I took a good glance at his eyes. Steadfast and resolute in his decision, nodded at me while releasing his hand. After that, I tossed it into corner, remarking it wasn't needed anymore. In sound of crowd singing Ode to The Emperor somewhere behind gun emplacements, we walked out side by side.

On the outside, even though battle had ended, the two sides were still non trustful to each other, but when we opened up the front gate, every gaze turned towards me. Together with Frederick, we now led whole crowd. It looked like everyone tagged along.

I think almost all fighters recognized me in floodlights. Certainly heavy ordnance folks did, pointing fingers at me. Due to absence of . . . aaaaaaaaaa, one Lord general, Brigador Emanuel Mastaf would take commanding duties of Central



Command for time being. Together with his elite soldiers, he waited in front of Hellhammer to meet us. Commissar ordered techpriest to ignite engine and told me to climb up. Seeing how my climbing attempts failed, he offered his hand to help me leap on. Just a lurch, but it felt like he was ripping out my arm. After that, Maroo, de Estana and some other priest hoped on, in great excitement to ever ride such mighty beat of war. Mastaf with his soldiers followed as last.

Captain has been ordered to take us towards Noon Square. There, broadcasting set has already been prepared. Scene designated with portable metal railings. And giant crowd awaiting us in great cheer.

Maroo has taken upon himself to convey message appropriately. Ceasefire was official, tyrannical reign over, returning of personal freedoms and relief from slavery work brought up a round of applause. Even though his voice would stutter from time to time, he did a solid job. Finished talk with last words dedicated to glory of the Emperor. Then, cleric Lopus introduced me as new servant of the Emperor, anointed in his everlasting glory and blah blah blah, you can imagine how pompous it had to be.

Reception was far warmer that it should have been. Lots of people recognized me as hero, who helped people's army to storm palace. Crowds cheered up for me for how I helped them in uprising, but most of all, toppling down reign of terror. There was also a matter of the recordings gangsters pulled up from Administratorum, which became a song of its own instance at the end of this very night, but nobody knew how much powerful I actually was. Apparently it was a beacon of hope for people to see that Emperor protects those who fought against injustice.

Unlike civilians, soldiers weren't cheering so much. This notion of sudden stop of the uprising left them stupefied. For military men, this was abrupt and unbelievable. Hours ago, unrelenting barrage of ordnance ripped apart besieging forces, their comrades dead in las fire, just drop guns because someone said it was over.

They weren't enemies. All of them were part of the same society played by nefarious forces, divided and then conquered to take from them even their own humanity. Of which speaking, de Estana had now in heaps and spades. This show of hypocrisy and obnoxious artificial compliance made me vomit inside. But that was needed, even if for show. I intended to make it right later, digging into what actually happened this night.

Since I barely could stand upright and facade slowly crumbled down, Frederick took me back to the top. Maroo tied up the event, after which celebration of new regime begun in roar of instruments and festivities.

Top floors were then mainly vacated, with few soldiers trying to dismantle barricades. I couldn't look upon just how wasted they felt. My own physical condition might have been as bad as their mental. Everyone had enough and were tired. I asked commissar to instruct staff to leave the junk lying around and have some rest. Dismantling posts could wait even few days.

The ball room was beginning to tidy up, although wall debris with chipped floor couldn't be repaired for days to come. Broken windows have been covered with curtains and sealed to the best of men's capability with available time. Moods of all people have lifted. Everyone now felt relief. It appeared that most of serfs and guardsmen knew each other very well. Some entire families were in this



workline for generations. Families with traditions, serving noble houses for times immemorial. Housecarl Nataniel was very proud to share his ancestry with me. I could see just how well was he prepared to serve his duties.

Small tables have been substituted by larger ones, all notes and scribbles were put on side table next to what looked like biggest throne on the planet. Mighty opulent, shining with carmine texture, gold and jewels, but not what I needed. In meantime, when tablecloth was put down with all foods and drinks for party, I sat my tired body on near sofa and actually fell asleep, flabbergasting Frederick and Nataniel to no end, who watched me with confusion. Exhausted didn't describe my state. Unfortunately I was woken up by housecarl five minute later, who needed to inform me of incoming guests. Instead of joining table, I needed to go to medical room. My body was hurting. Bad. He walked over to Olsmo relaying my need, after which they called someone and came to collect me.

How funny that Frederick who was shooting me few hours ago became my sidekick so easily. One might say it was irony of fate. Not that I trusted him. I did not trust anyone in this place, much less a former left hand of top politician, forced or not. On our way to apothecarium three levels below, a lot of newcomers greeted us not knowing who we even were. Oh, My mistake. Commissar was well known in every society as Commissar General and most famous warrior on the planet. Behavior of people we met indicated like war never happened in the first place. If it wasn't for my own aching body, I would join festivities as well. Even staff managed to throw party of their own in one of the vacant rooms.

Magos Biologis already waited in med bay. It was still governor personal quarters, so marble statues and golden flowers decorated even sterile environment down there. Even a damn fireplace. As soon as we came in, his servitor along servo skulls performed preliminary scan. We exchanged few basic greetings and information about my problem after he sat me on medical bed. With all machinery connected around it, this looked more like a workshop table.

Before taking off gauntlets, I could sleep anywhere. After, pain would keep me awake for hours. Skin almost melted off, partially adhering to inside protective barrier. Kaifas injected some ointment inside, to ease the process, but fatigue surfacing through only deepened the feeling. Removing gloves felt like skinning, some stimulants offered were very appreciated. Meat on my hands and arms started to rot. The power I command is too much for my physical body to handle. Some of my organs have been damaged by wasted blood circulating inside. Worst part was not physical though. My astral body itself was damaged. Just like copper wire has resistance to electricity, so my astral self has some resistance to the infinite potential of this power from beyond. Drawing too much would fry my very soul.

Damage wasn't so bad for my standards, but Frederick grimed down. Magos, like most of his kind became curious to see what has happened to me. My hands weren't digested by warpfire yet it was a mess. Stench of burned, rotting meat and blood gave myself nausea. Amount of energy channeled through hands in such short bursts scarred even my auric field. Ripping off that damn gate sure was painful. Remembering why I did it altogether, disappointment brought another kind of pain, which no painkiller could remedy.

To properly treat injury I had to take off upper clothes as well. Inner cooling made me shiver. Heater was setup next to my seat and room temperature has been adjusted. I didn't know if I was hot or cold. My hands felt like inferno,



my body cold as stone. Arms suffered much damage, but everything above collarbone was relatively intact. Everything below abdomen was relatively intact. Black burns and visible black veins spread across my chest.

My hands, though. . . Well, that happens all the time and I got used to it. There is no better way for me to use this power. Than mediate it from hand energy nexi.

Flesh looked like black, charred meat, mostly burnt to crisp. Some of my tendons stopped functioning at all. Bone was visible in few places. Black, gooey substance mucus stuck to my hands. And gauntlets

Those have layers of noctilith embedded under power plating, keeping my hands . . . “cooler” and increasing conductive power of those crystal formations allows for using more potential of that power before any damage occurs.

As servitors and serfs helped to treat injuries, my designated vice governor entered the chamber. Maroo shuddered on sight. Kaifas, clearly knew these weren't normal burns and that no psyker ever met such perils of the warp. Those were not of warp nature. He had knowledge about going insane and becoming food for astral parasites, but never such physical cost, becoming very intrigued about nature of my power.

A: What was about to say to them? Hi, I'm Ariel, lastborn son of the Emperor, and I came to save humanity?! Denzel's blazing balls, man . . .

A: Reitziger is whole another story.

A: I don't think anyone would believe it even if Father himself announced it.

A: Remember how even you had problems believing it?

I patiently gazed at all of them. According to colonel, everyone was waiting upstairs, inferring wild guesses to my absence and he needed to know how to respond. Commissar told him to pass knowledge of battle injuries without disclosing details, then he turned to me asking if I could go back at all. Looking at bandages on my body it was obvious that damage was very crippling. One thing I disclosed to them was my perpetual nature. But even so, I could handle sitting around rotten nobility much less than Warhound's torrent of fire.

When he left, I asked all serfs to take break. With Only three of us left, I begun to ask Frederick what did he know about Edmund Reitziger. He slowly closed his eyes, breathed in long, and judged current surrounding not fit for such conversation. But he knew. And later I would discover just how much.

All medical procedures have finished around 0:30 AM, which followed long process of dressing. Instead of my usual armor, Nataniel prepared new set of clothes. I recognized it from before – uniforms and fancy clothes were like rite of passage signaling acknowledgment of status, office, power, authority but most of all allowance of the old ways. Golden thread on white coat. Depp blue shiny silk gowns patterned with silver flowers. Shiny golden boots and padded gold cloak. I shuddered on the thought itself and did not want to wear it. It surprised all of them. Magos performed another scan of my cranium looking for brain



hemorrhage. I told him I just prefer armor plates. He said they would not have my size immediately available. In the end I just told them to clean my old stuff. It took half an hour, which I used for some sleep. Before we headed out Frederick needed to talk to me about the nobles gathered upstairs. It then gave me a chance to get better glance at him.

Very robust and wide in shoulders, head taller and very intimidating, proud posture. With closer view I noticed scar over left cheek dipping over lip into sickle was nasty indeed. His walking alone signified veteran nimbleness. Even under layer of armor.

Damn it. Everything in this place just reminded me of one big failure. I didn't even want to be any governor or take part in any liberation, or chase some corpo rats across stars. I never asked for palace of gold, or this whole hero glory splendor. All I wanted was to . . . That's right. What did I really wanted to find? What was BB to me? Would I really just take her . . . to where? Or what would I do with her? Was that just yet another chance at running away? Was there any aim at all in chasing what could not even exist. Didn't it blew in my face already?

Have I been running for so long I did not know how to stop. Could I actually stop? Maybe if I could go back to Ada I would ... Settle? Was that the whole point? Why after 12 000 years I could still not know my own place. Or did I just not want to acknowledge what I was?

Perhaps . . . perhaps this was the gist of it . . . somewhere I belong. Instead of just running around galaxy for errands of person long gone . . .

This wasn't a life for me. This wasn't the way I wanted to be. The ever present emotions of failed misery came back at me with all the greater force. But didn't I just become governor? Wasn't the world at my feet yet again? Emperor one knew just how much I preferred to vanish like mist into nothingness rather than going back upstairs. Or keep living in this perpetual mess . . . eh hh ...

Frederic has seen how exhausted I was, but he said not a word. Dr curious behind him eyed me suspiciously through his oculus array. He voiced concerns about my capabilities for leading government very carefully, since he was acquainted with fiery temper of Amschel. Advised proper rest before making any decisions, telling Frederick to lead me to bedroom instead of ballroom. Commissar looked at me dressing up, sighing. He asked Kaifas to postpone meeting “they both know about”.

I sat there half awake. It all felt surreal. A dream from which I never woke up. My lethargic state added to problem. But why would I even care for going back. I was on the top now wasn't I. I decided what everyone else does. Did I really? Or was it yet another elaborate trick of the light? Did fatso see through it so far deep into future? Just how much he planned ahead? Frederick knew. He knew. And knew much. Was he also on this? Was he still working for enemy? It all made me fall into downfall spiral of doubt, searching for slightest signs of trap, but in such state . . .

That free fall was interrupted by Magos looking for reason of my sudden lack of reception. This wasn't looking good. My inward delirium stopped, but I got carried away in “what ifs”. If something like that happened at the table, it would be very awkward, and dangerous. Another stimulant was in order, but no chems. Good old fashioned coffee had to do the trick. For now, some walking was necessary to start up aching body.



Walking up the stairs turned out worse idea than Frederick presumed. I had enough after just one level. One good thing about cheering, dancing folk, is that noise helps you to wake up. It looked like festival from the very bottom to the very top. It's normal for all the prominent persona to party night away, yet for serfs it was a rare occasion to occupy one of chambers for themselves. Bright music overtaken gossip and scheming, allowing me to not to pay attention to gossip. Tables filled with all kind of colorful beverages tucked neatly along corridor walls in lower levels, served as main drink depots for the common people, who were careful not to disturb upper class, although . . . whoever was already present at high palace would be high class by default. Even serfs. Somebody even took party outside to the park below.

I never liked crowds. And never liked the limelight. And there, whole gathering would watch me like animal in a cage. I didn't even care to take honorary seat, but found nice place near the windows. I was a loner after all, still hoping no one would care for my presence. Walking yet another time in this hall astounded me how quick people are to forget that few hours ago I displayed savage butchery upon some of their friends. Friends... Such meaningless word in world of politics and power. But was I actually any different? Where did I have mine?

Before I went on yet another tired rampage of self indulging, gold tray put on small table appeared as out of nowhere. Looking through window I didn't even notice how it got there - my order in addition to apple pie with some bakery would be more suited for dinner than coffee snack.

After my drink, Maroo came to collect me. There was no use in struggling. I knew that all players needed to know the game they will be playing from now on. All I could do was to prepare. Certainly Colonel did not. My first impressions told me he wasn't taking his position seriously. Judging by carefree behavior, the fact that rogue psyker decimated titan, then some of previous authorities, after rolling through entire army, did not sink in. Even hole in wall was nicely covered for now with drapery and no one ever pointed it out.

Or maybe I was the wrong one after all. I have seen this same pattern through millennia no matter segmentum or sector. How many times before I had the same breakdown. Why was I the one who could not enjoy life as the rest? Was this hateful remembrance corollary of my birth, how all this mess started out. I mean, I have been to this same point so many times I can't remember the number. This notion of taking over a kingdom, planet or even a war effort wasn't anything new for me. If anything, it laid in my comfort zone. Only the whole circus surrounding it wasn't something I could get used to. This need of people to see and feel that someone is actually there wasn't something my mind could comprehend on emotional level. Neither this absurd waste of resources in form of golden palaces. I am quite sure that amount of work put into this place would suffice to build whole new manufactorum. It could compensate for bringing up living conditions for each and every citizen on this planet. The amount of wealth concentrated in such places is unbelievably sickening and astronomically unimaginable for normal people in the streets. And . . . partially for me as well.

Each time I heard how "impoverished nobility" complained about hard times coming ahead, a mile long knife opened in my pocket. Cloying armors and puffed dresses, pompous castles and extravagant hypocrisy of small men acting big at the cost of people who made it possible to live their existence in excess.



From very beginning barons vaunted about their vast trading guilds, just to have de Estana bloat about being richest man in whole subsector. Nobody cared I didn't care. Nataniel proposed few subjects we could talk about, but for love of the Emperor, I couldn't stand hypocrisy for too long.

As I lifted up from cushions, hall begun to calm down and arrange seats at feasting table. Frederick thought I wanted to give a speech. Music from orchestra ensemble toned down into ambient. It felt awkward to be mistaken as such, but . . . it had to be done sooner or later. Taking a good look around, I now saw how unsure everyone was. Carefree enjoyment was only facade to hide insecurities. Were they all a reflection of myself? Or maybe we were all human after all, no matter position, status or gold we held. Different circumstances, but the same souls of eternity trying their best to make sense of this twisted world. Had I still have some power left, I would scout their minds for more options.

After the courteous greeting, trying to fight tiredness, I wasted no time in announcing how things would change for time being. Of course, nobility was used to have everything plotted for their own use and did not like even iota of sharing that hoarded pile of wealth with common people. I didn't care for vociferous objections or secession threats. All I needed to remind them was how recent transfer of power occurred. I anticipated civil was coming and all who had their fingers dipped into inhuman suffering imposed upon populace, would face consequences. Most of formerly boasting people became uneasy on their seats. Easy to spot when they got twitchy. None of them was prepared for witch hunting, just assuming they were vital in recreating new world. But for now, we had bigger problems. Instead chasing ghost of pasts, there was entire organization that was on the rise against Imperium, and this state within state had to be dealt with. This was accepted very fast. Anything to avoid responsibility.

I made clear to everyone that my goal lies in bringing a better world for simple citizens to live in. Few egotistic insecurities surfaced through, in discord. Some of present were thought of themselves as chosen ones and bore only contempt for the average nobody on street telling me that workers exist for them, not the other way around. One thing I could do as governor was to launch investigations against their businesses in search for fraud against Imperium. And it actually laid in my legal competence as well. As long as Tithes were upheld, I could be whoever I wanted to. This shut down lots of opposing voices, but raised bustling all around. Seemed like everyone was afraid of having their shady dealing uncovered. I knew absolutely each and everyone of them had to had cooperated with cartels since it was Amschel's prime directive. If any of this would surface, they would be lynched by very staff who served them. And probably sentenced. Probably to death. Voice of self preservation won over greed that night. Temperance was needed in heaps and buckets for this lot. With exception of one mature lady. She was laughing. Not deriding, but smiling at large. Mysterious and peculiar behavior. She either had some knowledge of all this situation or she was gone already. Either way, it was dangerous.

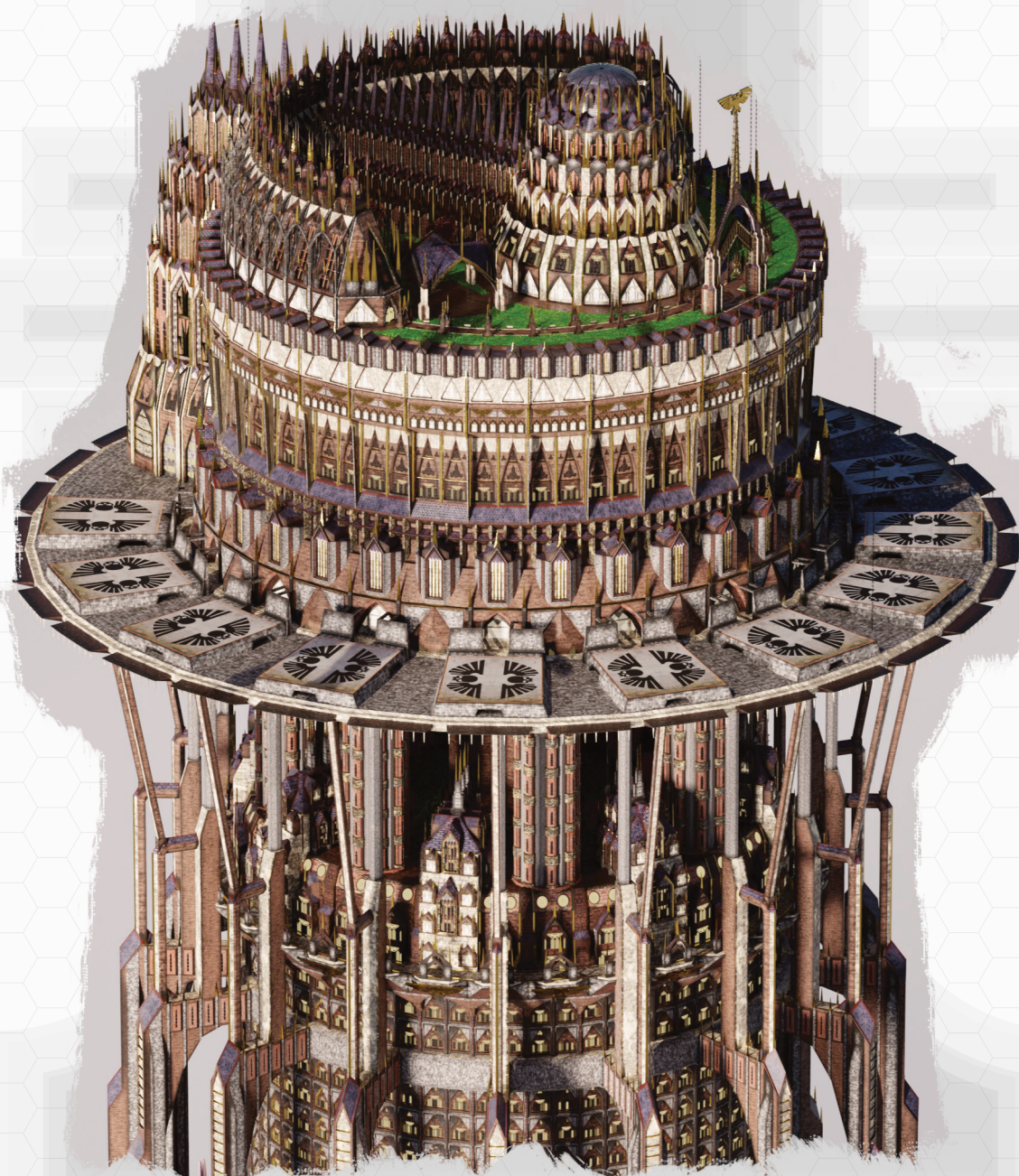
Enough was enough. I finished my proclamation and let ecclesiarchy to pick up on oratorium. Six minutes later, boastful toast to the Emperor's might and love of mankind crowned pompous speech allowing show to go on. Music resumed, liquors of unmatched quantity filled every table. Wondrous dishes rolled out for everyone to taste. By my own directive, all of the present, regardless of descent were allowed to taste goods brought forth. I could hear the cringe and cliché



complaints of my “frivolous mobbing” and “disregard for aristocracy” deep in the crowd.

If anything, I longed for a night under stars. What brought me peace far more, was bonfire with my brothers in arms after a sweet taste of victory. In places like that, I met the greatest joy. Resting on golden throne, although comfortable, felt hollow and alone. One might say I wasn't the most popular man among human society to begin with, but after announcement of power restrictions and authority decentralization, upper class society certainly schemed already. Bargains and new power struggle is something you do expect in this milieu. Actually, in politics anyone who doesn't have ulterior motive is the suspicious one.

Even in such uproar, as the whole floor engulfed in, with music, dances, shouts, toasts, celebrations, excitement and joyful songs, falling asleep was soooooo easy . . . And soooooo delightful . . .



— Arrival Day [47_] — Pursuit day [33_] — Day of reign [1__] —

When I woke up, sun rose behind mountains. Indestructible remnants of alco guzzlers were still up and running, but ensemble packed up few hours ago. Guests at large gone back home. Few survivors tried to take a nap on the couches, sofas and chairs. And floor. Some even in the garden.

This atmosphere of emptiness after such great balls felt even more strange than before. Grabbed my face to check if it was real. I wished it wasn't. Just a dream I would wake up from. Any moment now. In a minute. Just a second... but it never came. I was still there. My mind was still clouded, body stiffened, hands even if not ripping with pain, aching, still pulsating. Sleeping in chair wasn't as comfortable as one might expected after all.

Rising from the dead, I was immediately greeted by whoever was at the table. Four men and two women with champagne glasses still in hands. After a moment of small talk, it was obvious that these were not from yesterday, but arrived not long ago. But was it? The elder laughing lady looked familiar, yet rest of the company was certainly fresh to arrive.

Plentiful sunlight of cloudless sky illuminated amazing crystal sculptures on ceiling with vibrant blue color. Eastern windows were opened to let in some fresh air, but doors to garden have been shut. After stretching and few deep breaths, life returned to me at least in some degree. Maybe my habit of wearing armor should change from time to time or at least sleeping in armor, because I didn't feel rested at all. I know, who would've have thunk.

Even if weariness slightly subsided, lifting anything except a plate felt like heroic effort. My periphery senses were still dulled. When called upon by guests, I couldn't properly hear what they were saying. Feeling out of strength, I just fell back into the throne with impetus. Food on the table was still fresh despite being cold.

This snack didn't wake me up. The feeling of being hit by an Ork nob persisted. First thing at my mind, was changing clothes. Certainly, my gear have seen a better days. Few holes and rips, scratches, twisted edges, malfunctioning clamps, half gone shoulder guards, and missing plates. That carapace plate was at its end. Reinforced jumpsuit wasn't sealed anymore. Holes and tears throughout uncovered areas would be a hassle to repair. Reinforcement worn off some moths ago anyway. Ceramite plating underneath became disorganized with few missing scales. It never seen a replacement since 13 years. Dropping heavy metal had to suffice. Seeing how I struggled to take off breastplate alone, guests came closer to help me. We sat together at side table, chatting about how people have become impressed with my endeavor. They called over waiters to bring me proper meal.

Slowly chewing through my breakfast and sapping glass of wine brought forth the recuperation I longed for. Socializing with new people wasn't as bad as I presumed. Cheerful bunch kept me company in this strange and new place. Fortunately their presence was not about politics or business, but just for party.

They told me few things about previous governor. Like, how he disdained anyone to have better time, have fun without him, or not be in center of attention. Elder lady didn't hold back to enumerate all prohibition and tax laws he put in place, giving me clear nod to lift those. For relaxing societal pressure, of course.



Even if all I heard were complaints, listening to them was as awkward as it would be with anyone else. I just couldn't talk trash around and speak about the same things all over again in different manners. At least they knew how to present their cases in interesting way.

Though I did not speak out much, sitting between them was not that bad. After excusing myself with return to medbay, I didn't even know what to do with myself in that place, so I took a round of walk around corridor in hope something would happen. My mind wondered everywhere, shattered and drowning in uncomfortable meticulous review.

Since there were more and more people trying to engage me outside ball hall, I returned to the table. Pouring another round of pink champagne, a proposition to take a morning walk appeared as a followup to topic of planet's brilliant flower specimen. Since I had no idea about palace, a walk around rooftop garden felt like an introductory must.

It mesmerized me to see sprawling garden so high up. Lawns of big, pink and purple flowers grew around tall, gray trees with long, thin, red vein glowing leaves. Luminous pigment was very common in flora around world, which according to tales was most gracious at night time, in visibility of nebula. There were few flowers which stood out from all the rest.

At a little square with fountain, modest stone circle held soil sewn with green grass and most marvelous specimens of rose I have ever seen. Roses of blossoms as giant as my two hands combined. in colors of violet, red and silver. Strong and thick stalks filled to the brim with thorns, by themselves created a welter of beautiful miniature forest. Some of the roses grew almost half my height. Modified with local species, their edge glowing petals spread fantastic smell. I was almost happy to visit them.

Elder lady noticed my fascination. Begun to tell me actual history of those flowers, how even before Amschel's reign, almost half century ago, genetor named Reitziger taken his first steps towards his masterful craft, by enhancing and mixing gene pool of various plants. Ones that we looked at were his crown achievement in that field Sure as hell, they really did remind me of Ada.

Talking with her so casually, I begun to recognize her face from somewhere. Even though it was evident how mature she appeared, she still had youthful looks on her face.

In meantime I asked her how she knew about that story. Smiles turned to frowns. Gibberish into silence. It was more emphatic than words. All of them knew how it begun meaning they all have been on it from the beginning. One of the men just tried to switch subjects. I understood it would be hard to make them talk so soon, but it seemed like.

After another minute of awkwardness commissar joined in. Time for a meeting with bigger fishes. Something told me to run away. Be as far as possible. Return to Terra and cry in corner . . . I really should have had . . .

All of this was not my final destiny, this governor charade was not my desire, these golden halls not my place. I just shook my head a little and let out a sigh onto my chest. There was no better place to chase after Reitziger than governor's palace. Given the long stare, he only hasten me to the common dining hall, inviting lady Amelia alongside, which meant that she was on it after all. Rest have been instructed to head home.



Inside palace, great cleaning was in full swing. Most of clutter – removed from top floors. Lower levels still had things to dismantle. Staff seemed happy. From time to time someone even said hello. My casual nature surfaced through, being unable to take this . . . job properly serious. Once again, that woman was in full smile. I brought it up. For her, my informal conduct with surroundings was a breeze of fresh air after long decades of strict and uptight, human trampling protocol. In addition, my expression of self was truthful and honest. Something that was very rare in ladder of power, particularly in leadership.

On floor below, in front of stairs, four soldiers with an ogryn stood guard to make sure only invited entered. We headed to the end. Circular in architecture, massive in scope, guest hall, for lack of better comparison, was decorated with all kinds of flora in addition to sculptures and other forms of art. Sets of stone tables in circle of magnificent statue of St.Celeste were already set with all kinds of bakery, sweets and snacks. Few bottles of wine on side table. More than enough for only few people. We were expected to arrive as last. Four peculiar people sat near giant vista window on the eastern side. Two pretty girls sat at table next to our main event. Somebody perused bottles over liquor bar.

First one, sitting at the edge was Jhiddu Stalkhara. Second, directly in the middle, sat Elkor hive city overseer Makbat Borrod. Most notably clad in gold head to toe, but his implants were . . . ugly. It looked like someone botched a lot of wiring in hectic web of hasty and shoddy external pipes. Next to him, Magos Kaifas, who as it turned out was also a leader of local Cult Mechanicus. On the other side, solitary blonde man at dawn of age with tenuous figure was finishing eating a blue steak of closely unknown animal - Ervin von Rosette. His creepy looks were certainly . . . I don't know . . . “evil”. Something triggered my distrust for him at first sight. I tried to read his mind, but my astral body was in such disarray, I couldn't even read his auric field.

After Frederick presented participants, he pointed on the other side of the room, where last one was currently in progress of wine acquisition. Curtain of bronze hair, gray coat, gold scarf, velvet gloves, and gold, shiny elegant boots. That was all I could make out from his behind. Even from afar, he didn't shy from greeting us out loud. From voice alone one could deduce he was just very young, probably was just a proxy for someone. Very young, very noisy and perky, a provocateur in effulgent integument was getting on my nerves with few first words. Typical noble child . . . Even more so, that he brought two of his girls as well. In nonchalance he didn't just take a glass of wine, but whole damn bottle. And another one into his pocket. Free and outspoken, relaxed, joyful, sparky shining, sociable, outgoing, smiling pretty boy Tulio de Estana. Suddenly, I paid more attention to my messed up image. How little did I need to indulge in petty bitterness.

Frederick was probably the only one anticipating what happened in my head. And knew how I was wary of this youngster. Indeed an ugly sight, to see how pitiful I could become. I know that he wasn't a bad person and tried his best to introduce friendly atmosphere, but still....

Seven chalices on the table present already suggested we are missing one person. The last one was on the way, but would arrive later. Revered mother Synthia was occupied with soothing worries of the Emperor's followers. Fuck. I hoped whatever kept her busy would do so forever. Another prospect of holy woman pushing redemption upon me in name of the Emperor would blow my fuse



instantly. Besides, everyone have seen my reaction to the ecclesiarchy and clergy altogether. That would bring even more tension, but now, in hindsight . . . I think they counted on it. Yet, the strangest thing of all, was absence of someone one could call the most important person, even above governor. Cardinal missed out on our meeting. Frederick told me, "Because we have reasons".

As awkward it was for me, as routine it seemed for old timers. After few words of acknowledgment from overseer, congratulations of Stalkhara, Alastor brought up a round of toast to new governor. In tone of derision, von Rosette declined celebrating anything coming out of Reitziger's plan. Instead, he wanted to know what did fat frog tell me to perform in the office. For a second I thought to mess around with him, concocting some dumb thing, but it perished once I recognized how well did they know him. My lies probably wouldn't fool them.

Nobody wanted to believe I wasn't his puppet. Especially Frederick, who confessed Edmund sent him a letter, what it contained he didn't say of course, but it said to "expect change to come". It didn't matter if they believed me, but all my plans revolved around overthrowing tyrant. And it seemed that they were in bed with him all the time. Skeptic to my presence, Borot tried to understand game Reitziger was playing with them.

Thinking about capacity in my hands, I proclaimed there would be no new centralized conglomerate. Second, the molochian bureaucracy would be trimmed down to the greatest extent. All the silly citizen invigilation was to be demolished. Control over the population, as always, costs about seven times more than upkeep of entire army. All the infrastructure, offices, officials and equipment used to create secretive police and enforcing every little restriction would be disbanded, putting freed resources into uplifting citizens living standards, like building new homes and factories.

Of course, opposing views started to bring down these ideas and called for coming back to reality in which they lived in. As newcomer to the society, I should have taken more time to estimate best course of action . . . Stupid playing on time. I have seen this far too many times. Parasites trying to convince me to go along their enterprises to reap benefits of unimaginable riches. Another rise of people was more than probable in such tentative times.

If anything, I had to remind them why populace overthrew tyrant's rule in the first place. Their small and powerful secret societies would have no place in any shape and form. There would be no more feeding of pain and misfortune of the people. Understandably, it made three of them laugh. Old blond guy dared to throw a joke at me, trying to remind how it was all a false flag operation in first place. In their estimate, I could be removed from there as fast as came in. After reminding them how warhound ended its life cycle, arrogant smirks turned into awkwardness. After that, they played card of economical rule. Von Rosette was so vociferous he even got up from seat to throw his threatening displeasure about my mindlessness.

Again and again, the oldest trick in the so narrow playbook, "if you don't play by my dumb demands you are not getting my support". After 12 millennia listening to such bullshit, it makes me puke. When finished, long silence persisted until he sat down. One look into my eyes was enough to calm down and remember his place. Idiot forgot who was he dealing with, especially when information about my involvement in uprising was freely available and people already made stories of it. The stage has been set. They couldn't control me. I dealt the cards.



Tulio tried to tactfully suggest my approach would antagonize guilds, which Jhiddu picked up and run with the concept. All this time Kaifas recorded meeting with his servo skull as well as writer servitor without involving himself.

The three men present at the table represented around half of the subsector's wealth. Conglomerate oligarchs who would go to any length for securing greatest position of power. Until now, Amschel was willing puppet who sold out whole planet for personal gains, whilst me ... didn't give a damn about riches. Cannot buy me, cannot scare me, cannot change me, even cannot kill me. As it was not enough, I tried to take away that excess they already possessed and return it to proper use for prosperity of economy. I have become their greatest nemesis. Von Rosette threw lightning daggers at my soul. I could feel his hate. I saw how his auric field overcame with lust for power, blood and control, trying to be intimidating. After all, he managed to climb up to the very top of the ladder and there was no one to stop him yet. He really didn't register I scrapped titan just yesterday.

Up to my surprise, or maybe not so much, lady Amelia tried to hide constant smiling. Behind hand and napkin. It was Kaifas that asked her about this persistent matter, in return of which she bursted in laugh, called out loud for Frederick to come in. Now that I took a looked around, he wasn't there anymore, two girl sitting next to us were gone as well. Something was brewing, and it was behind my back. I didn't like it at all.

Firstly, I heard some metal scraping in the corridor. Then few men helped to up lift something heavy up the stairs. A moment later four wheels begun rolling in large platform with lots of data sheets and paper folders, stacks of documents, books, tomes, scrolls and digital dataslates. I was actually intrigued what in the world was going on. Giant cart could serve as king size bed. Giant was also the smile in eyes of Amelia towards the gathered assembly, which simply turned into victorious smirk and malignant preponderance.

Behind, few serfs made sure tall stacks do not fell over, while rest of the guards came in to help push it. That ogryn sure came in handy. Finally, after whole parade stopped somewhere in near proximity to center of the room, Maroo showed up. Up about flippin' time. This meeting was wearing upon me already.

In grandeur fashion, Frederick took first tome at hand to open it directly in front of me and opened it at random page. At least I think he did. Like cornered dog, old man accused us of treachery, backstabbing, betrayal and directed few slurs to Alastor. Tried to incite others to stand up, shouting his accusations, but fantastic four just sat in silence. As a grim reaper itself would dawn upon them, expression of imminent death slithered into their visages. Young lad, if anything was scared out of his wits not even knowing what was going on. But unlike him, I was shaking off my wariness instead of falling into despair.

If there is one thing that totalitarian state likes to do is to collect surveillance on its minions. Those loads of documents were iron testimony to this perverse fetish. What was laid in front of me, was the earliest recording of secret meeting of few wealthy man, who decided to bring forth peace into warring world by assuming control over it. There were few persons who I recognized: Reitziger, von Rosette, de Estana, Aramid, Capricci and Del Tu Roh. Aramid and Capricci were actually two older underworld bosses I met at gathering before assault. No wonder this whole attack was so easy to muster, it was after all in the family.



Almost like I wasn't surprised at all, damn, even anticipated it. As I said before, playbook of the high and mighty is borderline narrow and predictable. Evil is creatively bankrupt.

Names that I had yet to uncover identity of was Kagami, Crowley and person accented only as BB.

Fuck . . . Black Betty . . . My fucking Emperor . . . well . . . ehhhhhhhhhhh . . .

At least I knew it is a real person. Or was it just a coincidence? Perhaps just a trick of the light to mess up my head again. Or aimed play, considering how fatso sold me wonders of BB.

Flipping pages and reading further did not leave me guessing. It was a meticulous scribbling of every damn word during these sessions. On the back cover was authors name - Kaifas. Back then just an acolyte in ranks.

Instead of addressing new information on sight, I jumped off the chair and begun to search for following tomes. While rest of company begun heated discussion about this situation. Plundered stack of paper with furious fervor, but none had mention BB another time. Frederick, looking at me stated there was no use in such haphazard lack of methodology. Whilst our party argued validity of this move, one more person showed up. "Revered Mother" Synthia in company of her celestians entered room as it was her own damn bedroom. One look at this tired face made me sick. On the other hand, look of sisters was dazzlingly beautiful. You already seen Order of Laurel Crown, but damn . . . once I saw them for first time, my jaw dropped to see how they took care of feminine part within order.

Most notably, hehe, Leonida. Wonderful, glamorous warmaiden clad in black armor plated with gold cherubs, insignia, red, cushy cloak. Pauldrons adorned with adamantium flowers. Side skirt crafted of carmine, metallic, paisley drape. Bouquet of white hair, thick like fog, hanging freely almost as long as her height. Silver circlet glittering with glossy sapphire stone in center. Taller than her sisters almost by a foot, wielding massive shield in left arm and a giant golden power sword in the other. I can't say if it was just a fatal charm, but she reminded me of Ada enough to place them as cousins. Never before would I think to see Adepta Sororitas of such magnificent, feminine beauty. All her sisters . . . looked as wonderful. For moment I doubted they were real Sisters Of Battle at all, considering I just destroyed false space marines.

Whole charm dissipated once canonesse opened her mouth to proselytize me with her overbearing dumbassery. Duhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. This day was getting worse and worse. I was just a simple nobody yesterday, which was all fine by me, and today I am in the middle of this den of snakes to set it right as with touch of a magic wand. And if that is not enough, a damn religious holy bitch is butting in right in the middle to preach her stupid brainwashing she didn't even believe in. It was evident from get go, how hypocritical was this behavior. Even her sisters felt bit cringe while listening to her overreaching fervor, but . . . they would not dare to correct their commander. They left us alone and headed towards guest chambers.



A: There is great difference what normal order inculcates into sisters. I myself saw few times how their belief in Emperor materialized miracles on battlefield, but this . . . was just empty preaching, pouring water void of faith . . . not even a blind regurgitation of material. It looked like she made it up on the spot.

A: Well, Synthia was like one of those stupid priests who didn't practice nor believe what they pushed onto others. Sisters truly believe and live by their faith, unlike damn ecclesiarchy. It stunk with hypocrisy, especially when I could just . . . never mind, it will come across later.

Only one person daring to stood up to that, was lady Amelia. As much as I wanted to be left alone, she had to bring me into conversation. After all, I was acknowledged governor now. How surprised Synthia was, when I denied her blessings. Oh how searing was the capital offense of not bowing to their service to self hierarchical cast system. Hardy and haughty Synthia couldn't stand poking holes in her belief system nor calling out her obnoxious behavior. Argument of power was the last reasoning she could muster. Stupid cunt didn't take no for an answer. Too bad I had more experience with obnoxious assholes than all of them put together, being utterly unmoved by her tantrum.

Two of them argued back and forth about what emperor would really expect from his devoted daughters. Yeah . . . You cannot imagine cringe overflowing within me as I listened to that bullshit. Of course no amount of reasoning can change mind of a holy figure deified by masses as some kind of idol. It wasn't until I brought up this deifying part she finally settled down. To pose oneself before Emperor was a blasphemy not even someone like her could get away with. Not to mention pilled material about her involvement during rise to power. But this she denied as having no recollection of any of this. She decided it was all provocation and doctoring of evidence.

This whole situation was a mess square powered. Dealing with this political mess was not even remotely near comforting. Shouting, bargaining, calling names, proselytizing, buying, selling, convincing and threatening was all that lot was capable of. The only one who didn't say a word was Tulio. Kid was clearly just a proxy for his family. I continued to browse through documents. On different table of course. That one was too loud and lousy. Frederick stood guard, making sure nobody would disrupt me or change their threats for actual action.

In meantime I just let the four multi-tasking villains go at it for almost an hour, until I found what I was looking for - oldest mentioning of character BB. Date staple suggested almost sixty four years before. Context of mentioning posed that figure as very close to magician. Their conversation revealed early connections of the whole group. Looked like Edmund and BB knew each other for practically forever, with few occasions it was mentioned, they shared ample passion for beautiful flowers. Records didn't contain any of their conversations, only what Edmund relayed to the rest. From those conversations it looked like he met BB and decided to make her beauty eternal. Unfortunately, there was nothing more on the subject.



Lines

8615 - 8629

Lost due to recording data corruption

And so, weather I liked it or not, burden of putting this brothel into some acceptable state had to be carried by me. First thing that came into my mind was to simply cut them off, and with this overwhelming evidence judge them into capital punishment. Of course they all thought that this meeting served as creating new world order. Such surprise made overseer stand up and demanding "fair" treating, Ha ha! I couldn't believe how far up his own ass had he gone.

Even "Revered Sister" had to calm down after swallowing bitter pill of reality. None of them had anything on me and I was not corruptible. They had nothing that I wanted and I had everything against them. Outright execution would be more than justified by any arbiter.

Commissar asked me to hold off my judgment, asking to accompany him into more quiet place. He told me yesterday that speaking about Edmund was not appropriate in medbay. Now was time for further inquiry. We walked outside. While on the balcony, I shut the door and asked a lot of uncomfortable questions about his connections to the group. Heh . . . Well . . . he told me whole story starting with in deep dive into his own history.

Lord Frederick Olsmo. Born in M41.946 in hive city Elkor entered military duty at age 16. While in military he was stationed at Akeno, moon of Shogo, the rocky, giant planet of system Nerolinia, as part of soldier exchange program, which was secretive branch of Militarum that grew super soldiers without use of genetic recombination. Drugs, murder training, abuse, trauma based mind control. You know, such things.

He was brought up in such condition for two years until place have been shut down and recruits returned to home planet. In next years he had problems adjusting to society. Couldn't heal scars on his mind as mind wipe was botched and incomplete. In year 967 he managed to get together with other test subjects of the program and created anti establishment cell of war veterans. Wars on planet were sporadic, short but very bloody. It was mainly nobility who wanted to make more and more riches off war industry, pushed periodic conflicts to use the most deadly, destructive and expensive methods of war. Mass genocides and nuclear holocausts were a normal thing for last thousand of years, it all ended when Amschel Martens took over reign in year 969.M41.

With new governor, backed by most notable personalities of the time, new journey to the stars have started. New frontier for war was declared – races of xenos, swaths of mutants not fellow humans, which convinced survivors of super soldier project to join into newly created corps. As young as 23, he was submitted for commissar training after exceptional achievements on the training grounds. Commission lasted for three solar years, during which he met with like minded people, who wanted to provide peace and prosperity for their brothers and sisters back home. With vigorous leadership he displayed during early years of conquering surrounding planets from xeno savages, 12 in total, he was then introduced into governor's honor guard in year 976. By 980 he begun to see the



machinations of few individuals that were leading whole planet into corruption and abuse of power. In the beginning he would only see sporadic, most blatant attempts. It took him two years to clearly see scope of these conspiracies. During another year at palace, he tried to track down source of this pyramid.

At time of reaching conclusion that governor wasn't played around, but was one of the puppet masters, he was caught red handed in attempt to steal one of the tomes to bring it into public view. He was given a choice – death or indebted servitude. More than ending his life, he planned to play long game to uproot this sacrilege when opportunity comes. Of course, with concept of cooperation came promises of power and riches beyond his imagination, connections with other most influential people and eternal glory in halls of heroes. That last one did not transpired ultimately, because hall of heroes is strictly female.

Few months passed and year 985 brought complete change in regime. Armies that were away from home could not intervene when bloody pogroms and purges begun in great cities. Yet another false flag operation allowed shadow organizations in power to grab authority in its ultimate form, by reforming whole society into hypocritical collectivism. Democracy.

With help of the underlords and prominent figureheads who were puppets in their plan, few megalomaniacs managed to become shadow kings behind Ecclesiarchy and Administratum. Holding every official in their pocket, they could dictate any law and doctrine into existence, which in few years brought officially sanctioned slavery. At first, it was just allowed to have xeno slave servants. Few next months changed that as well and actual people became commodity on the market.

In M41.986, Edmund made his first appearance in wider underworld, outside his bunker hill. Of course, public did not mean all available. It was closed and elite company of shadow eminences, who gathered at castle Monetgue in southern hemisphere. He presented his bioroid for first time. It made such ruckus between present that it became instantly number one desired product in the whole world. Ugly human trafficking became most precious export merchandise in last decades. Not even army or weapons of mass destruction had such taking. Inflow of gold and precious resources made cabal the most wealthy people in whole subsector. They had agents on virtually every habitable planet in whole sector. So great was their over reach, that some of the families made themselves a name in history of segmentum, even in Agripinaa system. Until lately, whole clandestine society had gone forward unopposed and started to dictate terms for other subsectors how to do their planning. Because of this mass shortages of common goods and raw resources plagued everyday people with arduous strife. Unfortunately, instead of proper investigation from Terra, they were helped to further this nook of tyranny. How do you starve population of agri world? Well . . . you stand fanatical, brainwashed soldiers everywhere and just don't hand out the rations.

He didn't have to say another word. I knew what had to be done. And I knew just how incessant was this perennial quest of bringing light into the darkness. I have done it for freakin' 12 000 years.

Leaning against stone railing, looking onto ground beneath me, on the mountains next to hive city, gravity and severity of this whole mess made me realize there was no escaping. After all, I knew myself. I couldn't just abandon everyone for my own satisfaction. This damn congenital care for humanity would



leave me with piercing and agonizing feeling of guilt if I just run away now.

With all the wisdom, knowledge and understanding acquired through my life, it wasn't hard to help world rise up from it's knees, but . . . I was just tired . . . Always being aware what kind of morbid bullshit ravaged your everyday citizen and what causes it. And that no matter how much you try, there is never an end to this madness.

All I could muster, was laughter at my cursed fate. This chase after my own "happiness" ended up in bullshit. Again. This is the legacy I was given. Vagabond without home. Forever to roam. Reaching into the dark, retrieving light. The never ending cycle.

Yet, my expertise lied not in management. I know history of our galaxy. I know of war in heaven, as Eldar call it. I possess knowledge of the old ones, the nature of immaterium, the creation of egregors, the manifestation of warp entities, existence of higher dimensions, layers of creation, cosmic rivers of energy, nature of souls, cycles of life, death and rebirth. I know about underlying mechanics of manifestation of physical and astral world. All of it for purpose of returning balance to this world . . .

What Father raised me as, was daemon hunter, not a damn magistrate . . .

I always knew why humans behave the way they do. With such knowledge any need for judging vanished. Even if this lousy bunch inside tried to screw over whole world, they were still humans like any other. Just... morbidly misguided. But I didn't have time to mend their insecurities. I didn't have much time for depression either. Urgent matter that was at hand couldn't wait. Knowing at least some of the shenanigans, I asked further about what was the connection of people arguing behind the glass.

22 years before, Synthia visited planet Mara as part of Black Ship entourage which collected tithe. During that time, regent governor, who was not in the know, invited her over as guest of honor to the palace, right in time when a very important meeting between Amschel and von Rosette took place. Being of curious nature, would eavesdrop on many conversations that ultimately led to storming the room and firefight between guards versus squad of sororitas. Despite being warriors honed in fire, one squad of battle sisters was easily brought down by stationary military. Last one remaining sister has been persuaded to cease hostilities and hear reason. By any normal standards, Synthia was an elder in her order, one of the eldest, to ever reach age of 70 at that time. Instead of riches and power she was promised another youth. Genetic advances of underlords have managed to undo some of the aging process of humans, thanks to which they remained fairly young, despite many decades behind them.

She didn't need much convincing. Problem of killed sisters of battle still remained though. Even if hiding bodies was easy, explaining it to the inquisitor Mendaz proved more difficult. A present in shape of few metric tons of gold has gift of convincing. Solving that case actually opened new line of power acquisition for cabal; now they had a friendly contact inside inquisition, which would be of much use later.

When next visit was due, Synthia stayed behind on planet as inquisitor's agent. Aged palatine received then salubrious treatment inside bunker hill, which recessed her age by 40 years. From that day on, she has been placed in mission of bringing flock of the Emperor closer to rule of phony monarch, speaking for cabal



to dull the masses. Mendaz, who was knee deep in this treachery, has perished on the battlefield few years after, tying one more loose end. Being a sister of reverence, she had great influence on people, ecclesiarchy, army and visiting important personnel. With her, many stubborn warmongers as well as sly backstabbers have been persuaded to either join or vanish.

So far so good. Nothing surprising yet, but looking at sisterhood that fallen so low was surely undercutting. If they could persuade inquisition on their side, what else did they have hidden? Time has come that I asked about the other lady, who didn't like sisters at all.

With a bit of exultation, he proudly presented Amelia as one of heroines that was still alive on the planet. Apparently at age of 150 years, she was still holding up, mainly thanks to the rejuvenating treatments.

Yep, I would never guess. I would have said that 40 at most. Whatever magician could do to keep females so young it was working... like a charm. No official life elongation methods could hold a candle to this. I guess that shadow brokers really know how to make a product for sale. Finally, gold could buy you eternal youth. In my experience, that was the most sought after commodity in the entire galaxy – eternal life of luxury. Damn it, even if all those evil acts were indeed hideous, the advancement done for humanity was great in itself. With such technology, whole species could reach a golden age once more.

It piqued my curiosity to know how did that heroine even lasted long enough to be treated somewhere around year 974. According to commissar, she was glorified granny. Last nuclear war on Mara happened in year 899, when major Amelia Alastor, at age of 49 launched a surprise attack at the northern front, in district of Olman Fields, taking city by storm and effectively budging front line which was still for almost two years. Acting outside official orders, being renegade, she took 4th Maran battalion to charge right past the stationary defenses. Being caught with pants down, secession, in form of proclaimed kingdom of Cantalory, was easily overrun by blitzkrieg. Central Command did not take it nicely. After one more deathstrike launch, even imperial soldiers turned around, and aimed at mad nobility. By end of the year, bloody wars have been stopped, but as rogue soldier, Amelia was to be court marshaled and sentenced to death for insubordination.

Of course, in time, investigation revealed that deadlock at the front lines was due to few oligarchs pulling the string behind the war, who could not have anyone take their own initiative, outside dictated way of thinking. When news about it spread within population, new uprising have overthrown governor and hailed major Alastor as hero of the war, thanks to who, whole conspiracy surfaced. She was awarded with nobility title and a statue in halls of heroines. That's why I recognized her from somewhere – one of giant caryatid columns. She was vital in setting up new power structures that lifted citizen's toil for next fifty years. After cabal regained stranglehold on authority, being old granny, she was proposed to say few nice words about new regime to receive gift of another youth. Even if she aided in initial nefarious reforms, remained as opposition within organization. The only one thing she could do, was to openly antagonizing "powers that be" in public. Some might say, right into their play, like it was all thought out earlier. Makes you wonder, just how long is the game they are playing.

Von Rosette was entirely different league. Guy was one of first conspirators since the dawn of time. As far as M41.935 he begun his empire in coalition, with



then rising star Blacklight, private mercenary contractors, to shake industrial world out of its pennies with hostile overtaking. Without scrupulous, he used every available tactic at his disposal to fulfill his goal of becoming the richest man in Imperium. Not much was needed to believe the wretched and morbid monstrosities he pulled off to become shadow king. He wasn't quite the talker however, so he needed a front man.

Before meeting this powerful man, Amschel was but a cog in meat grinder of Administratum. Fate decided to put them two together to realize a plan they both desired to happen. In year 954 Edmund was introduced to the package as an innovator. Not much is known how it transpired but they had to keep in tabs, else a real inquisition or mechanicus investigation would expose them. To make it not happen, a proper leader of their own needed to be installed into puppet slot of the mechanicum. With few priest officials present, converting techpriest Kaifas to join the cause was unsuccessful at first, but few months later, in 958, he have seen how great are capabilities of offered rewards. Political, influential and actual authority of Magos was unimaginable on such remote planet. Recalcitrant Kaifas finally snapped when riches of archeotech cogitor vault were laid bare before him. Knowledge of ancient times as well as dark, heretek secrets have shifted his loyalties.

In four next years, secret society have managed to infiltrate remains of Collegia Biologia on planet, which was only remaining learning institute for the acute, engineering minds, although its specialty was naturally . . . nature of flesh, be it human, alien, plant..... etc, you know what institution it is. To complete the puzzle, Mara's agri business had to be tapped into. Even before Amschel received office in the palace, he managed to siff through Administratum libraries to find a proper candidate for the agri magnate. New farmland tycoon had to be in the business already, and needed to be easily influenced. Perfect match was Jhiddu, whose farm was going bankrupt, because of industrial restrictions on water supply, put by Von Rosette's slimy practices who controlled water industry on whole planet. To feed his large family of four generations living under one, small roof, he wouldn't hesitate for a moment. Perfect puppet and front cover. In next two years, vast numbers of requisition piles ended up bolstering no name farm owner into western continent most serious, agri product supplier. Leaving all ethics behind, bright future opened up for all of them.

Binding their time, to wait for perfect opportunity, years of clandestine operation and under-the-counter shady dealing helped to buy into ecclesiarchy as well as to establish new footholds on other planets. Akeno station was first to be opened as secret black site, where they trained future shock troopers for their cause. Under careful disguise of official Militarum program, black site was successful in producing number of brain dead, ultimate obedient soldiers for the overthrow planned in 969. Without proper technology backup, results were far from perfect, and most of them fell into terminal case of psychosis, meaning they had to be put down, to not to jeopardize further plan. Closed after 14 years, and abandoned for almost 40 years, ice moon still has some of the remaining madness intact, although no one returned to check it.

With successful coup, installing new hierarchy in official way allowed for unprecedented power abuse since thousand years ago, when whims of delusional and paranoid governor slaughtered in nuclear fire almost $3/4^{\text{th}}$ of the population. Fresh edicts, at first appearing propitious, then were amended to introduce new



angle of interpretation. By 972, madness has gone so far, that even participating minions wanted to stop it. Unfortunately, stranglehold was too tight. Holy fire of the usurpers purge cleared way of disbelievers. Burning at stake or impaling in company of hangings and sanctioned, public crucifications shook the world to its core. Even if these happening consumed, just, tens of millions lives around the world, cleaning out capital from opposition left a bloody trail, that has not been forgotten. Some places still mourned the dead with candles, prayers and masses. Since the day of the saint Ververcht in 974, which marked end of bloody revolution, a new power has risen undisputed and unopposed for over twenty five years. Until yesterday. I mean previous day. You get it.

This whole plan was supposed to be an excuse for civil disobedience treatment, which powers that be, wanted to use to pass another edict of restriction for non aristocratic cast. This included bourgeoisie of non noble lines, which would squeeze more gold, even from malignant followers. My intervention just stymied all plans and had two of the head figures run away in fear of failure.

Why then, person who helped to create this whole plan of dominance devised a plan to topple it? Those behind the window didn't know he didn't send me as the intended puppet of change. Or perhaps I didn't see it. To them, it was just another substitute on Edmund's command. After all, I proved to be so easygoing with everyone, so informal and casual, that it seemed like we knew each other for years. All this arguing might have even looked like a couple quarrel.

Just, what in the world I got myself into . . .

More and more I thought about it, the more I just wanted to to leave. I really missed good old days of straightforward killing. All I had to do, was storm the damn fortress, kill the boss and get extracted by Thunderhawk. Sometimes it was sneaking or running, but it didn't make much of a difference to me anyway. Right when I was deciding to let it go and tell Frederick I quit, inscrutable alias has been spoken.

BB. Reitziger told him about my . . . "reward". He showed me this letter. It only had three sentences. "Change is coming. Let him through, he is your way out. If opposing, remind BB is waiting".

He wasn't proud of it, but surely needed to keep me in game. After all he said it himself, that whole plan is crumbling down and stage changing. He needed me in front, even only as decoration for time being, to right his wrongs of so many years. Together with Amelia, a plan, in participation of lesser parties, has been devised during last night, to break chain of misfortune that has befallen upon Mara. To him, matter was personal. Twenty years of unwilling participation in crime against humanity has worn him inside. He needed the chance to repent his sins to the Imperium and the Emperor himself. I, the wrong man at the wrong time, was divine opportunity that true resistance needed. A sign of Emperor in times most dire . . .

And he knew, what I desired was Black Betty. He promised me to help in that matter, even if he himself did not know details. Being unwilling and opposing to his former captor Amschel, trust did not come to play in between them. Most notably when something was connected to Edmund, who was paranoid secretive from the very beginning. The only knowledge he had about bioroids, were 7 girls Amschel hosted as his concubines.

Even if so, I needed more time. This all too sudden meeting made possible



to commit many mistakes in reforming process, of which I had no idea of. Perfect play to keep me in dark and engaged at the same time, while underground movements would settle everything on their own. Apparently, canceling this meeting was not an option. If I did not make it work myself, others would use silence to announce imaginary agreements. We concluded in consensus, that I would cooperate in bringing down corrupted world of secret societies. Till he helped me, I would help him, although notion of ever meeting BB faded into horizon.

I could see new energy invigorating commissar as we stepped inside. Warm sun of the afternoon moved out of the window wall and turned more into west. Shiny floors of palace premise now laid in shadows. Few empty bottles of wine stood on the compartment table, in front of the curtain. Deriders of the free world waited patiently for my arrival, not uttering a word. None of the present knew what would come next. I suspect blondie anticipated strong opposition entangled with stubborn, idealistic doctrines spewing out of my mouth. Synthia twisted imaginary daggers into my soul. Maroo already stroked trigger in virulent glances. Kaifas, sitting nearest of the corner between column and wall, backed down anticipating firefight. And Tulio... ? Poor Tulio didn't know where to put his eyes on. Clearly inexperienced in any of this stuff. Borrod . . . closed eyes, recessed in prayers to the Emperor. Silently.

Instead of accusing or executing, call for dinner was very much in place. Being the governor had its perks. I could demand any food in the world to deliver right at my plate. It was far too long I haven't eaten a pizza.

While waiting for ordered meals, a small talk with young de Estana shed some light onto his career. In seat of his grandfather, Marcus, who was vary cautionary to come in those tentative times, his sole goal was to relate everything that happened, directly to family elders. As noble family for centuries, strong customs and hierarchies demanded that whole business was conducted under wisdom of the seniors, but it was too noisy to make public appearances, even despite he met me at ball yesterday.

Which by the way, placed Tulio is precarious position. He was brought up by three mothers, who always cared for the only one heir of family. Living with seven sisters, three aunts, two grandmothers and serfs composed mainly of female cast, was more of a playboy than a distinguished noble. Fortunately he didn't mind my insights. After all, his own father, and those before, had similar experience. This meeting was his first real taste of power ladder, and he was out of his league. As part of his "duties", he needed to ask, how much of a role would army play in upcoming years, which by the way was really good question. I turned to Frederick, since Maroo was completely green and not in the loop, when it came to this stuff.

According to Frederick, planet had garrison of 2 000 000 registered guardsmen and around 3 000 000 of professional mercenaries at its disposal. But at large, they were occupied in major cities. Most loyal, of course, housed in barracks of Elkor and palace, which was about 50 000 men. Around 70% percent of these numbers were in active duty. 2 Warhound scout titans were worked upon in the magistrate chambers of Manufactorum Wezun. One belonging to Adepta Sororitas, and . . . pieces of one destroyed previous day. 4 Knight errants, freeblades from Blacklight. 6 Baneblades, 6 hellhammers and 6 Stromlords heavy tanks scattered around planet in tangent of few hundred Leman Russes, were core



armaments of entire army. There were 3500 of chimeras and 7 gorgon transports, but heavy weaponry was almost exclusively motile. No siege machines. With such equipment, defending against any invader would prove difficult, not to mention any crusade. BL contractor was said to have as many numbers. They were built up to be Von Rosette's private army, outside Imperium's disposition. And so happens, no one was wiser. Ervin just smirked and poured himself more wine, correcting Frederick about Blacklight's army, with additional 1 000 000 professional soldiers on space stations.

I did not care at all. Passing the time was sole goal of that conversation. I indulged in it however, since there was no better thing to do. I was curious about presence of sisterhood, and did not shy away to ask Synthia directly. In smears of unwilling moaning, she declined to disclose anything connected to the order, deciding I wasn't worthy enough to know works of true devotees. Actually, she used more colorful words. Never before had I heard of sister using such foul language. So much, it warranted Amelia's fiery response. And so on for a minute or two.

As right on time, servants rolled in with our meals. This was probably best pizza I ever have eaten. Moment of tasting brought in a moment of clarity. New ideas came in spades as I shuffled those cheese bites down my stomach. Whatever was in there, tasted like heaven. Guests already emptied all immediately available wine. They were very curious why I would not have any, and very suspicious of person who does not intoxicate themselves with ethanol.

A: No, never.

A: Because just like drugs, it disrupts your auric field, punching holes in your soul and spirit. You ever wondered why alcohol is called spirit? Because it withers your soul aura, making it easy for astral parasites to penetrate your mental defense.

A: Instead of looking at esoterics, look at how those things manifest in reality.

A: Every chemical compound is result of specific energetic construct in form of molecules, which have their own manifestation process. Physical reality is nothing more than a standing weave of cosmic energy harmonics.

A: Like with Ork technology! Just because you don't understand it, doesn't mean it doesn't work.

With at least some tension cleared, after the dinner we could proceed with further talks. I made it clear that times of self serving power abuse was over. I explained that chasing ghost of the past would prove to costly to sentence every person who supported their cause. They were given a choice – The soft way, just fuck off, fade away and make room, never to be ever heard of, or the hard way – challenge me and die like rats in public display, after bringing their conspiracy into public scrutiny.

With little to none choice left, assembly have acknowledged me as leader of the administration, for what it was worth. For now, only Frederick knew I never intended to stay for long.

After agreement has been set, giant book of Sororitas have been carried



into hall. Without presence of sister famulos, Synthia had to do the “honors” of swearing me into office, which she “humbly” declined. Kaifas proposed he could substitute her, but there wasn't even cardinal to sanction my presence anyway. Up to everyone's surprise, I agreed with Synthia. After all, it was for better no official traces of my presence remained anyway.

I was already convicted criminal in whole galaxy by virtue of being a rogue psyker. And in suspicion of being half-bred xeno, warrants on my head were given out in thousands through galaxy, singed by multiple inquisitors. Of all three ordos, mind you. I didn't need any tracing or permanent imprinting. What would we do, then? Just like the cabal wanted, set up front man on the governor's chair, while I remained in shadow.

This brought another verbal firefight, who should do the honors. Maroo was out of question. I might have pointed him as my own vice governor in public, but he did not have credentials to be put into official record. I was wavering between Amelia and Makbat. Both of them would be easy to work with. Woman was more of idealist but did not have outright authority. Overseer was in good political place, but I knew he was puppet of Ervin. And whoever would be put in, was to become official governor recorded in holy books of lex imperialis, and factual, after I left.

To close off the heated argument, I decided to take a gamble. We stepped out of chairs to gather in middle of hall, right under main chandelier. No one knew what to expect after I spaced them out in a circle. In pondering glances of inchoate sources of anxiety, heavy breathing and quandary anticipation, my survey of environs and participants sure filled room with excitement. What is going to happen? I could feel energy concepts in their heads racing through in uncoordinated fashion. I didn't have to read their minds, but sure as hell, just reading their auras gave me enough ideas.

Is he going to kill us one by one? A test of endurance? Would he wait for sign of the Emperor? Why am I even included in that lot? What trickery have you prepared? Emperor protects. And so on....

Instead of amusing myself in this muted charade, I took one of the empty bottles and put it down in the middle of the circle. How frustrated they became to understand what was I up to. Since one person was missing I asked out loud into the hall, who wanted to take vacancy. No volunteers. I took a stroll around room to find someone amiable to join in. For a moment I thought about playing on evil with them by selecting ogryn, but that idea passed quickly. Fortunately. With Maroo, we went out the doors to search for someone.

Next to Mastaf, female sergeant in classic flak vest tried her best not to make eye contact. Just don't pick me! Not me.... Please just not me... I couldn't resist. Some nice green eyes on that brunette. Few seconds of staring gave her no idea. I had to give out special order to make her tag along. More than anyone, that girl, because her pretty face did not look like mature woman yet, wanted to vanish into thin air. For once, the somber old geezer laughed, looking at the circus about to be started.

White bottle of Deorum Sanguine shone in strokes of crystal light. Golden trim, red label showed in part its heraldry in center. Everyone present knew what this situation meant. Hope written on their faces suggested, that all of them actually wanted to win. Once in a while, a blind faith will decide our fortune, not



the ugly influence peddling.

Time has come. Dead silence is violently cut by scraping of glass. I close my eyes. Slippery polished marble kept bottle spinning for few seconds. Anticipation. Excitation. Anxiety. Even though I did not participate, I vicariously felt the welter of emotions. Sound of scratching glass kept echoing forever. Final tripping added some screech into the fray.

It stopped.

Designated person stood behind me. Shock of doubt and disbelief threw everyone into awkward silence. Almost everyone. I wasn't surprised at all, to see how one out of place character won way ticket to hell. On the other hand, rowdy shouts of victory filled the hall. Even if there was maybe twenty guardsmen watching from doors cheery applause seemed like a war cry. Up to displeasure of shadow king, even Frederick rose his voice in resounding viva. I haven't had such fun since... I don't know when I had any fun at all last time. Doesn't matter.

Matter of fact is that long lived heroine Amelia Alastor became next ruler. Surreptitious gaze of Von Rosette, said more than every objection he could shout. Another war was coming, but it wasn't my problem anymore. That woman was more than enough to rally the people and put up a fight. In one swift move, it was possible to shut up the opposition and gather people behind, without pointing a finger. I could get out of this mess as soon as I got in it.

Yeah . . . if only . . .

At least some of my problems were gone. I could leave planetary matters to her and be in pursuit of slimeschel, even if rest of SoS didn't help a bit. This day of defeat would surely antagonize them. It meant effective beginning of their end. Of course they still had time till I disappear, but they had to rush to regain control.

For now, we had to calm down rowdy soldiers. I was thinking that we should go back and reach some kind of agreement with remaining parties, yet elder blond would not have it. He left our company in threatening screams, writhing and fuming with hatred. I swear he even spit some saliva on his own chin in this tantrum. Good boy Jhiddu had to rush to catch him, after a moment of uncertain pause. He obviously choose wrong side. Revered mother showed some dignity and swallowed defeat with honor. Tulio didn't know where to sit or what to say. Lost like child in a fog. Remaining two decided to be useful in upcoming reformation, pledging loyalty to new official. For a moment, I was even forgotten, but as soon as I stepped to look for some books, topic changed to address struggle up ahead.

Unfortunately, those people were still upholding me as main character in this story. They still needed to use me as crutch, and made it clear, even Synthia, that they cannot win this fight by themselves. Even if they had official power with them, remnants of the secret society would not relinquish grip on authority or economy so easily. Fate of the planet was still undecided and I was the one with power, authority and strength to help people. Most of all, now a beacon of new hope for population. Before I even got here yesterday, knowledge about my must have been spread far and wide.

That day . . . it all feels like soooooooo long ago as never happened . . .

Everything was falling into place too easily and too quick. I haven't even cooled my head yet. My hands most of all.

I asked in return, to tell me everything Edmund told about me. According



to them no one knew anything, Apparently only Frederick had one letter warning of my arrival, which he showed me already and it didn't contain anything.

Sheesh I wondered how much more I have missed.

It was some minutes after 17 hours local, when we sat again to talk about it. Mainly long lasting members did. I haven't had any particularly insights to share. Few hours later, I explained to them my real goal – following trace of Black Betty. Urban legend stated, that she was the most unbelievable, slinky beauty world had ever seen. When I met magician, he stated the same and boasted even more about perfection of his creation.

From what I heard in the response, Black Betty was very closely guarded secret of geneticist. Even inside inner circle, information about her were almost unobtainable. I mentioned character in the books named BB, but no one had any information who was that or if it was even connected. Might as well just be a name Reitziger passed, of someone precious to him onto his work. It was unknown if Amschel was in the know. Disclosing what happened in abandoned resort did not shine any more light on it. I even doubted that this . . . thing even existed, or was just a code name for another underground operation connected to other planets. They couldn't help me with that. But finding Ada was different thing. In fact, she was seen by Tulio on previous day. There was a meeting between scientist, in company of some transmechanic with his father in a residence near main shrine. He was asked to accompany her, while “adults” dealt with business.

At once, my heart was gripped in jealousy. Painfully obvious was my fascination with her. Story about our first meeting in bunker was apparently passed to everyone inside inner circle, because even Amelia acknowledged how dazzling beauty Ada is. And nobody knew she wasn't full human. Once I told truth, that she was a bioroid, nobody believed me. Two ladies seemed to have met with Ada through years and always behaved like real person.

To ease the situation, commissar advised to call it a day, and perhaps return to subject tomorrow. I didn't feel tired anymore, in contrast to everyone else, whose eyes and chins displayed notion of mental and alcohol fatigue, but I did not oppose. All I wanted was to uncover secrets of those books. Kaifas admitted even him did not know what was contained in them, save for the ones he signed himself, which were but a copies of original notes done by early members, assembled into one source. Past 21 hour, meeting was concluded. Unexpectedly, members did not part. Contrary, colloquy just rose in intensity, after dropping the official protocol. Only little Tulio expressed need to go back to family. Sisters came in, to celebrate with their senior. Remaining guest chatted about all the unimportant matters that would happen from then on. Unofficial planning session went smoothly without me, as I dived into shuffling gathered material. Going back to tomes I already read, trying to squeeze more knowledge from them, was not so productive. Two hours later, I had no more information then previously and no idea where to even begin the search.

What I noticed however, were furtive glances of sisters, who looked me. Especially Leo. I felt those gazes at my back. Silly situation. As soon as I turned around, they averted gaze. Funny, just how different province worlds were from mainland. At least devotion to the Emperor did not loose impetus. In most cases that is.



Return to stack of scrolls gave me some better idea about modus operandi of someone, who was actually controlling group from behind. Persona who gave motivation and insights how to implement methods of behind-the-scene manipulation with their wealth. Refereed to, in manuscripts, only as SIN. Few of the scrolls contained detailed information about psychological nature of humans, probably best studied species in the existence. Science of individual thought pattern, mass behavior, spirit forms, magnetic attraction of auric field, aura reading, spirit force manipulation ... connection between emotions and soul energy ... methods of extracting life force...?

That was outright occult stuff. The only ones who I could think of to have such incredible progressive knowledge, would be Father. This ultimately explained why a fatso, in Emperor forsaken hole like this, had the means to create perfect specimen of human. He didn't come to conclusions by himself, but drew from works of others. Still, I will admit he did perfect this method considering how Imperium dislikes progress . . .

I brought this to Frederick's attention, but he had no knowledge of it, whatsoever. Since this went deeper than he thought, he offered assistance in research. So did other soldiers, but I would not trust them as much. And I actually wanted to gather that knowledge myself without unreliable reporting. At 21:30 we moved platform to library, after which we gave all the serfs free night and chambers were emptied. Appearance of Magos who offered assistance in our endeavor was a nice surprise. Rest of the lounge came by to check upon us. This was dangerously close reminding a team effort. Of course, they would not go through books hunting for information with us. They wouldn't dare to blemish their unscathed, pristine nobility with work. After few minutes, we bid our farewells, allowing me to get back to my work.

But before we started to open up mountain of paper pandora, I sagged into armchair to rest my eyes, but room decoration captured my attention instead.

Colorful frescoes in the ceiling framed in gold floral abstract, now dimly lighted, presented me with magical views of simple village life in country. Hanging gardens painted on the wall, with flowers made of crystals and gems shimmering in declining light. Wood, cassette paneling on the wall, encompassed various colorful paintings in gold frames. Tall bookcases filled side walls of study in megalithic spirit. Lion corbels on the entablature, with crystalline chandeliers hanged by golden chains from their mouth greatly increased immersion of monster slaying, frieze relief.

Furniture, wholly crafted out of locally grown magical tree, which left purple and pink tinted veins on dark, bronze color. Some luminescent flowers in hanging pots, glowing in light blue and purple, entwined light stands in coils of lengthy petals. Light Strokes, said Frederick, was the name. Somehow distant cousins to fern, wide and long, although filigree flowers, were most common luxury plant on the planet, more numerous than Death Blossoms. It was clear to me, that flora of this worlds was somehow infused with warp energy.

Art in the room could keep me occupied for hours to ponder upon, but I felt far greater urge to keep digging into books. It didn't happen though, for my few day long lack of proper rest resurfaced around midnight, after which I stopped registering what did I just read. Even though I now had bathhouse and royal bed, sofa pillow served as my cushion.



— Arrival Day [48_] — Pursuit day [34_] — Day of reign [2__] —

This was best sleep I had since months. Nothing was hurting or aching, clothes did not imprint itself into side and lengthy sleep finally felt like rest. Beside some stupid astral travel affair with random warp prankster entities, I was well rested in physical world. As soon as I woke up, officers standing guard called for household staff. Mess we left last night was still intact. I begun to remember what we found. Setting soldiers at ease, I invited them for breakfast. Out of all luxury around me, genuine Crane Tea became my favorite. Reminding me innocent, young days . . . habit I picked from mother . . .

A: I had . . . foster mother. I was taken to her after . . . I got removed from palace, after. . . Magnus broke in. Father decided it was better to keep me hidden from everyone. From world.

A: I was . . . born. Guess that isn't exactly the word , but . . . seven years prior to the infamous incident. Dad had one last go at genetic manipulation after primarch project got busted. It was very, very, very, secretive project, hidden underneath laboratories. So much that even Malcador did not know I existed. I assume. Only after project was completed, He informed him. Or at least He told me so during my first visit.

A: I never actually met any Primiach. He was very clear that I was . . . different. Even from other different people. He spoke that . . . eeeeeeeeeee . . . my brothers especially wouldn't understand nature of my existence.

A: Because he . . . used very unusual template for my genetics. One that . . . wasn't supposed to be known at all, else . . . schism would happen much earlier. You have already seen I don't follow normal rules of psykers.

A: You wouldn't understand. I guess no one could. Not even exodites. I doubt even Dad does. . . .

Well. While we ate, I asked about moods outside the palace, in larger population. Master sergeant Jason Theodolite, member of Ordo Tempestus, now assigned to be my personal guard by vice-governor, concluded there is unrest in the southern districts due to quick power change. Most of citizens do not believe in regime change or proclaimed idealism. There are sporadic skirmishes between army and local crime organizations. I asked if it was the same "skirmishes" as was in my case - gang up upon random people.

With a doze of unrest, he declared that such individuals were in process off discharging form ranks since assault on palace. Most notably Commissar General Frederick declared mercenary forces to be incorporated into Militarum, which wouldn't sit well with corporations. With change in financing of the Militarum, and new directives given out by colonel Maroo, large layoffs have been undertaken in just one day. Up to his estimation over 400 000 soldiers were projected to be honorably discharged in next few days. Some very disturbing ones, sent to the "remote assignment". Also, the notion of Amelia Alastor becoming acting governor made its way into gossip between people, spreading like wildfire. Generals of the old system were very upset that they were left out of the loop and some even openly voiced their lack of support.



He also reported, that almost exclusively, most notable people in chain of command were put there due to their connections to previous governor. Questions about their removal, were apparently easy to answer. Legally, they were in too strong position to remove. No proof of the shady dealing and under the table contracts were available. I suggested accidents. With tentative smile, he had to refrain from commentary. It needed proper authorization. Using my PDA, I called Alastor to discuss the matter.

Maybe I got carried away, eating wonderful chocolate pastries, or maybe it was yesterday hook up party, but I shot her point blank with the question. At first, sear of laughter filled up vox caster, followed by long sigh. Turns out, that she was few rooms away.... In guest rooms. With awkward moment of silence, she invited me over, right after telling me to take a bath. She could smell me previous day from mile afar... Well... I wasn't exactly focusing on my looks during these few days. My clothes were in need of some repair. Or change. Or outright burning . . .

Following her advice, I asked to lead me to a bath house. This wasn't your typical over the top luxury suite. Rotunda was situated partially on the edge of upper floors to ... not to allow any peaking. Bath house had nice hot water spring with a lot of leather seats and comfy mattresses padding marble edges of bathing pool. Overwhelming Corinthian sculptures on the walls, on the floor and on the crossed arch dome as well. Place was built for kings, no doubt about it. And their spouses. Amschel was very indulging in physical pleasures of body. Many times have been recorded, as he received girls form Edmund to accompany him, with recent record of seven. Accommodation in the living quarters was designed to house multiple spouses and indulge in activities for multiple persons at once . . . Yeah. Bath house was added by him later, to take full advantage of his harem. Including mode of art, which was very explicit in nudity.

Can't say I wasn't impressed though. Or little envious. Being all alone in the room, suddenly did not feel right. Longing for a company was being more and more nagging. Memories of all those women I met in my life came rushing through. Few of them came any close to be desired by me. Even fewer to be courted. Every damn time the same happened. Void in the morning that couldn't be filled by any physical means. Left alone once again. And in the noon . . . another world breaking calamity to happen. . . .

Had to stop reminiscing the past. Near ten o'clock suggested I hurry up with the day. I never could adjust for non-standard local time, which came in form of disorganization during the day. Back on Terra, I would get up early in the morning to start off the day with some solid whooping by master Aellius. Which I never liked. Training me like custodes when I was just five years old. It didn't matter I was growing up like any normal person. By now, it felt like I was supposed to be at work, not in bath. Precarious feelings, which grew even worse than what I was used to feel.

No time for worrying. Lots of things needed to be taken care of. My looks included. In the changing room, set of new . . . fancy clothes were prepared for me. I mean it was all perfectly done and fit me like a glove, but still, it was out of place altogether. Dandy garb . . . bleh. Easy to get used to it. In few years.

I could finally use some hairbrush for a change, instead of improvised wire construct. Combing hair is one few things I actually pay attention to. These shampoos, made of locally grown coconut oil, really got the job done. Normal showering gel dispenser, issued on the front lines, was more less basic soap with



. . . whatever thinner was at hand in the Manufactorum. And not always salubrious for health. Last time I had any fine accouterments was at Ultramar, two and half centuries ago.

Once I was ready, honor guard led me to guest rooms, where lady Amelia, in company of Frederick, disputed with Synthia claims on Imperial doctrine and ecclesiarchy's methods of converting. Two religious devotees talking trash about imaginary systems of belief, meant to put shackles on minds of their own human brethren. Such divagations are always too dumb to take it seriously. And was one of few things I just cannot stand . . . Like Eldar poignant preponderance over humans Dumb asses cannot see beyond end of the through despite looking into the future. But ... indoctrination and conditioning is strong even in their society. Or inquisition. Yeah . . .

Reminiscing of some of the darkest hours in my life didn't help the fact that I had to break into stupid arguments, seemingly up to benefit of both of them. I cut them short in their own delirium, so we could focus on the proper matter. We reached an agreement in a mere hour. Those who wouldn't repent were to be outright deleted. Those that would, were to be put into proper divisions, where they would make use of themselves. By noon, I took Frederick to go back to the books. Kaifas already cataloged giant set.

Stack of books looked borderline uninviting. So much that it felt like I shouldn't even start. Last night brought none of the results I wished for. Magos helped us a bit by arranging gathered stuff by date stamp. It didn't solve our problem though. Or rather MY problem. There was like two or three thousand tomes in addition to hundred data slates, in which there might have been like one or two sentences of BB overall. I kindly requested that guardsmen leave us alone and returned to reading.

At first it wasn't much. Just mentioning of how they wanted to proceed with a plan, execution, resource scatter, human acquisition, etc. Most of time, just gibberish of how they basked in their glory. There were few random persons who participated in talks form time to time, but Kaifas said they were dead or missing already. Only the core of the group remained inside. Composition was simple - circles within circles. Few chosen ones would know whole agenda, but sub organizations were to operate on different ideas, and sometimes conflicting with each other. While overall plan proceeded with caution through decades of hard strife to finally snowball after meeting strange eminence. One cannot infer much from just talking between them, but it was obvious in few sentences, that he was slender and taller than everyone else. Depicted as having a hooded coat with strange, faceless mask with only one eye opening, which was decorated in unknown art style. Girl who expressed interest in said art described it as natural, floral and tribal enigmatic. This did not ring any bells so I turned to Kaifas for consultation.

Of course, such paintings were nothing new on Mara, but creation of such masks was indeed unheard of. His best guess was that it have been made off world to give impression of nativity. It clearly stood out. So much, that in next few tomes, this guy is spotted and recognized by this mask. In tome dated for 963, name SIN showed up for first time in any particular context, as one of conspirator ladies asks him out for the upcoming grand ball, which is outright refused. Even though he was never referred to as male, it was always a woman, who addressed him in such manner. No description of any kind whatsoever. Those went by in



private, I presumed.

Every next time he would arrive, a new knowledge would be passed to the inner circle. What was in return? We had no idea. Even Magos, who was in the loop much earlier than "he" would make appearance, did not know anything about those. Contents of knowledge was unknown. Those were not input into books, and it was explicitly noted. I wondered if occult things on the scrolls had to do anything with it, but there was no definitive answer to that. As we tried to systematize information from scrolls, it became obvious, that it had to do something with desecrating human soul essence, which makes sense, since every species has specific soul matrix and unique method of attachment of soul to the body. There was some incorrectness in those papers, but after an hour or two I understood that they were intentional. Circles within circles. Only those in the know would be able to take full advantage of it.

That still didn't shed a light on matter, how was it obtained. I got my own stuff from early teachings of Emperor and then Isha'el . . . she even took me to the . . . Black Library. . . Never mind.

So I actually knew how to connect everything properly and saw through discrepancies in described rituals. Some parts were missing entirely, like origins of soul, nature of warp, scientific bases for warp manipulation, influence of subconsciousness on manifesting in real world all the stuff that actually would help to understand how souls manifest non physical occurrence in third dimensional world. Of course, there were multitude of other branches missing. These scrolls only helped to connect soul matrix with body. Every modern studies reject those notions, believing only in scientific materialism, not taking approach of discovering the so called esoteric. Which in tragic irony is contrary to eternal nature of souls. Mechanicus, embedding machine spirit into object does so only by crude and inefficient methods, not even knowing what they are doing and why does it even work. Yeah, everyone that tries to discover something is instantly called heretic. All up to amusement of wraiths of the warp.

But in this instance, whoever has given this knowledge, did so knowing how horribly mistreated it will be. It made me look back, at my encounter with Ada in the bunker. Maybe, the fatso in fact did discover something in that encounter, which enabled him to attach soul to, by then empty doll. Maybe he connected few dots himself. Maybe I missed something. Maybe it wasn't the same clone.

More than this, rituals described were of very primitive nature, but needed no mechanical equipment to perform. Seemingly, they were done for purpose of siphoning life energy out of victim, but no. These rituals were setup jest exactly, so the person would suffer mental trauma most, not physical, which only could mean that very dark and sinister parties were at play. In essence, described actions were leading to harvest of low vibratory, very dense energies, that creatures of the warp couldn't even incur, yet fed upon. Those energies were not of creation, nor they could be used to manifest power into realspace. One thing that Father did tell me about construct of those feelings, is that for creatures which exist in low dimensions, the very dense and low vibration, fields of energy from higher realms are like narcotics to to such beings. According to Him, warp is not a dimension of its own, but just a halftone in symphony of creation, not actually fitting anywhere, and thus not carrying any creation potency. It is after all just . . . it reacts to minds of the living. All of the warp entities are just egregors.



A: Egregors are matrix constructs of collective subconsciousness.

A: Weather you believe it or not does not matter. Your believes do not change objective state of the world. But strong emotions can be very powerful rivers of energy which mold warp into . . . whatever person is conditioned to believe. So yes . . . partially . . . your believes do change something, but its not believes per se, only power of your soul which is in turn built upon those believes. Where your attention goes energy flows.

A: Oh, c'mon! As Ordo Malleus, you should know how warp is working.

A: I mean, come ON! The same goes for warp. It manifests how galactic matrix of subconsciousness is molded by its inhabitants. There are no soulless beings. Everything comes form source of creation. Even warp is source. Other dimensions is source. Your damn rosette is source. Even Khronate anal beads are source energy manifestation as well.

A: Sure, sure, just keep yer shirt on.

When I put some of the pieces together it was already bedtime. We went through like twenty some books and scrolls that day, but still got near to nothing. Of course I didn't share my insights about it. How suspicious would it be if I actually knew all about this occult stuff. Since they didn't ask, I didn't boast about it.

Frederick led me to my bedroom, which existed on the higher spectrum of luxury. Really? My, governor's, what was the difference now. Not that I have seen many governor luxury palaces from inside. Maybe it was just over the top for me. Still, that bed could fit like twenty more people, probably for the same reason bathhouse was done. Aside from giant bed near windows and some extensive wardrobe area behind folding screens in the corner, there was a guest corner in the middle of room, similar to the one I saw in Bunker Hill, with the obvious exception of quality and quantity of decorative additives around. And mess. Because, since moment Amschel fled, leaving his double, triple, quadruple behind, no one bothered to clean room.

At least it started to fell like my place again, with long forgotten foods still on the table, largely uncoordinated remnants of lingerie all over floor around bed and dressing area. Someone left in a hurry. Bathroom was wide open with a lot of cosmetics still inside. From the looks of it, at least ten different bottles of most expensive perfume brands alongside most expensive accessories for beautification. In gold canisters of course. Towels were left on the counter and banks of bath tub, which still had unchanged water. Weird aphrodisiacs bottle toppled near shower. Taste of sweet honey intermingled with remnants of the musty air of wet towels and spill of the champagne. Not ventilated for 3 days straight. At least "golden throne" was clean.

Once again it felt out of place. When I looked at all pieces of clothing beside me, on the bed, on the floor, it felt like I would have a harem of my own. I really disliked it. Not only the mess. The feelings. Most of all . . . envy.

I am quite sure that seven girls had to be a gold sink for him. Judging from quality of the lingerie and fancy laces, it had to cost a fortune just to cloth them. Watching as wardrobes were opened, with dresses thrown all around room,



visions of bustling chatter, laughs, moans and complains filled my imagination. And I could not decide, whether I envied that vision or despised it. Nothing could erase the subtle smell of women in that bed, and even more, the energy residue soaking the very fabric of space itself. With a bit of focus I could nearly feel what was it like to have so many girls around, yet too tired to even fantasize about it. Can't even tell when sleep overcame me.





— Arrival Day [49_] — Pursuit day [35_] — Day of reign [3__] —

I didn't sleep long though, even if creature comforts were through the roof. It was like near 6 in morning, when I decided to visit kitchen for breakfast. Only two guys hanging around, on shift duty. Normally staff wouldn't be here till 7 o'clock. No one got up so early in the palace. Unlike me, locals were adjusted for longer days and sleeping time.

I just made my own meal with a jug of tea. Two men were clearly expecting a rebuke, feeling that they somewhat messed up. It needed explanation why I would not scream and yell at them for actually doing something myself. As one can assume, everything had to be done under Amschel's heel.

Last cook who made him a bad dinner ended up cleaning floors for rest of his career. Surprised I even would talk to them, they shared a lot of insights, how wonderful was to be doing their job without whims of person who didn't know shit about . . . anything actually. From what I heard, about former governor, he had nick for doing business and charisma, but aside that . . . two left hands. Some clapped in surprise when he wiped his own ass.

Not my words, just relating what others said.

I watched clock before restarting book browsing - 6:56 AM local, which meant I actually got to my work sooner then most of the servants did. It actually felt settling to have semblance of normal job again.

Frederick haven't shown up until somewhere before noon. Kaifas fella would not come for next two days, due to Cult Mechanicus' problems at the Collegium. Many thought I was another front face for the secret society, and argued secession from this establishment. Magos had to give away some of the heretek as alleged proof, that I would guide them towards new discoveries. They didn't know it was heretek, but if they did . . . well . . . you know yourself. . . they would just want it so much more.

Five kilotons of paper later . . . I found records of black budget, special access projects undergoing at the time in Astra Militarum on sector wide scale. Year 955 brought new initiatives into existence. First blacksite on Akeno was opened, new communication devices constructed for easier communication. Of course these devices were used solely by SoS insiders. No one in their right mind would challenge the technological stalemate on mass scale. New, much more efficient fuel has been developed, or brought from oblivion, for star ships, allowing for 250% more efficiency on one refill. Still, this is still stupid internal combustion engine technology, something that humanity had like for . . . 39 thousand years? So no, its not innovation.

Innovation was creating new type of antigrav propulsion system, allowing ships which mounted them, for safe planetary landing with no assistance needed. Even cruisers could land on their own. Most of all, this propulsion allowed for immediate interplanetary movement. According to book source, it has, or had is better term, capacity of performing speeds of up to 1AU/minute. This would render interstellar flight possible without warp. How, there were no blueprints, only mentioning of Schootex, artisan from Lokinyth, who pitched them new technology ideas in exchange for resource acquisition.



A: Yes, it does work like that!

A: Whatever.

A: I'm sure, that by now, it is already in forges of Mars, bringing new technologies to use for benefit of the mankind, and people will finally be free from warp travel. Don't even bother.

A: There ain't nothing holy about you!

A: Really? You want to tell me about your operations maybe? Daemonhosts maybe? Cherubael, Suvfaeras? Ye . . . that's what I thought.

A: If only Malcador would see you now . . .

Lines

9785 - 9797

Lost due to recording data corruption



— Arrival Day [50_] — Pursuit day [36_] — Day of reign [4__] —

It wasn't until next day, as we found mentioning of BB. One of dataslates had archived transcriptions from personal correspondence between members of inner circle in years 941- 982. In correspondence between Reitziger and von Rosette recorded in 982, there is mentioning of her name. It was about how they looked upon world, and how they approached business of bioroids. Ervin was bitching about how resources given to him have been yielding no tangible result for his operation, sending everything to SIN. Edmund stated that it was his great joy and plan to grow “daughters of Betty”, who could carry spark of her life into death, warning von Rosette that children of BB were out of his reach, but he would make sure to create new line of progeny for his thirsts. At the end of this conversation, Reitziger told Ervin that he still played great part in his plan and one day he would witness its fruits first hand. This depleted my vigor. Even if unconnected, it felt like mystery just gotten worse.

During break time, we discussed some of the planet's problems of common goods stranglehold. Dealing with pesky hoarders of wealth was much more than they could handle at that stage of affairs. It might have been mere three days after takeover, but regaining control proceeded swiftly. For some it seemed like too easy to be true. Frederick cautioned me, that in few days, I really would have to make public appearances and accept few visitations from those who are yet to choose their sides. That was the part I feared the most. He assured me not to worry about my different looks. After my display of power during uprising and handling von Rosette, nobles started to shake their pants, ready to negotiate even at a loss.

Nothing major happened until Kaifas returned to palace to help us with pile of paper on our hands. He brought servitors and data terminal on which slates could be accessed and studied in greater detail, perhaps uncovering ciphered data. So we dived into mysteries of archeotech. Overwhelming amount of data about human genetics suggested that someone, somewhere, somewhat, someday, uncovered old data repository. White papers from 17th millennium and academic research about warp travel and its influence on human spirit.

At that moment I demanded Frederick to tell me where did they found those records. Answer was – from Amschel's secret meeting room. All of the material has been stacked inside panic room, in which no one could enter but himself. Apparently his insurance against being sidelined or tricked.

On the night of grand ball, as I was sleeping at the party, he gathered some enginseers and force opened that can. Data slates were packed into boxes without any labels. Giant stacks of books neatly tucked into dark corner of the chamber under a blanket.

It didn't make sense as to why he run away with such hook constantly twisted into SoS's flesh. And every other flagrant misprision of his office. He held quite the evidence against every other member. Easy to strong arm any decision. Especially when negotiating change of power structure. Why he took girls instead of this was beyond our understanding.

Anyway, this technology was 27 000 years old, but overlapped current state of Imperium by light years of advancement. For a moment, I swear I saw Kaifas



cry oily tears from his oculus in ecstasy, as he browsed through data.

It contained knowledge about nature of DNA, its intricate relation to auric energy fields, methods of binding soul to different soul matrix, process of channeling energy through energy points in our aetheric field, energy access points in body, wavelengths of DNA, astral travel methodology. Interstellar drive technology.

A: What do you want me to explain?

A: That would take hours. Even if so, only techpriests could actually understand what I am talking about.

A: If you say so . . .

Most interesting was the knowledge about magnetic nature of human active consciousness. It had the same information as I found with mother, but some points were off track. There were holes in scientific data. No, not corrupted segments. Information presented had missing links. Papers about phase conjugate fractal field had troubles connecting and anchoring emotions to physical body. Emperor taught me, that emotions of body are not chemical in nature, but first and foremost, it is the soul's energy changes that manifest in physicality as those molecular processes. Fractality is the most basic principle of any existing world. If something is not fractal, and cannot self implode, YES self- implode, meaning energy cannot fold onto itself by means of golden ratio and golden ratio squared. It has limited lifespan and will be erroneous in long run. Which equates to – it will vanish at some point. Warp, being only a half tone, cannot be self containing, and as such uses outside energies of the “soulful” entities to keep its energy system rejuvenated.

Any dimension created in cascade of source has a certain vibratory rate upon which it exist. Higher dimensions have higher energy capacity and greater creation possibilities, but those incarnating on lower levels do not have bodies suited for experiencing those dimensions, and as such they get obliterated. It is about amount of energy we can host in our . . . body container . . . Just like we do not touch objects that are too hot, because their matter has too much energy within its system and obliterates our own. A principal of dominant frequency. Too much energy equals too high frequency which we cannot stand . . . and we disintegrate from low vibratory rate of our bodies to atomized state of high frequency quantum soup to match energies which were just introduced, effectively evaporating out of our own range of energies. And light spectrum.

Mature soul knows how to channel those energies through, within third dimension, enabling them to bypass veil of the warp entirely. It is more ore less the mechanics of what you come to know as Pariah Gene. Hate and disdain towards them comes from fact that their spirit is actively displacing energies of those connected to warp. Just like I told you about disarrayed energy nexi in one's aura done by emotions. Null maidens are not soulless. Whoever conjured that term is just ignorant. They cannot be measured because your average sensor array does not pick up those energy ranges. And nobody in Imperium knows how to construct it anymore. Much less how it would work.



Emperor has the same capabilities. Reason why daemons cannot withstand presence of Sisters of silence is because they passively channel higher energy from higher planes, beyond veil of warp in subconscious mode of operation, without capability of coherent molding. Yet, since those entities of warp, who are not native to physical space, are built upon the dark energies of fear and hatred, low and dense energy system, cannot remain in composure in presence of those high vibration auras. People like me and Father are tuned into rate of energies that lie beyond warp. Necron technology is capable of this. Only difference between us and so called null field is that we know how to direct it, using those energetic constructs in more or less coherent way instead of just . . . splashing it all over the place.

I already told you that warp is just a halftone, and it is halftone down. It is impossible for those creatures to withstand blissful and harmonic power of source, which simply dissipates their energy, making them fall back into the dark pit of warp or face total annihilation. Since everyday people are also tuned to the warp, due to nature of incarnating process and veiling, their souls are tuned to warp and the mishap between drawn energies makes them very antagonized. Literally putting their physical existence in jeopardy just by standing near.

Warp is also the cause why active consciousness is veiled from its whole self, because to incarnate into so called "realspace", soul has to go through that dissonant space which distorts its energy, making it impossible to introduce its whole, eternal consciousness into such low capacity container like physical body, squeezing through this tar like, dense structure of warp.

How easy do you think is to implant few dark thought into fully opened and unaware soul. Whispers of the dark, which pushes us to all . . . this ... "evil" things, are but parasites trying to feed the pathological actions leading soul to emit those dark and dense energies, upon which warp can feed. Just like . . . C'tan in old times . . .

There are many beings more vicious than warp demons who feed upon misfortune of others. Everything that society tends to call inhumane or evil is nothing more but a set of manifestations that are dissonant to the world energies around.

Ultimately, everything can be segregated into actions leading to fractal synergy or destruction. Innate desire of peace and love is just subconscious guidance towards creating systems, or society in this case, propagating infinite sustain. This is the default mode of operation of gargantuan part of all souls. To topple this balance one must introduce only one or two walls, which inhibit flow of those energies. Hence we have archetype of "evil". Those lead to destruction, introducing distortion of energies and cosmic harmonics of creation. Most souls sustain their spirit upon higher energies. Only those who are really out of coherency of creation reside in those dark and dense energies, what we call lower realms. Since they are already waaaaaaaay beyond existence in light, they cannot undertake direct action against such energy systems, thus taking over or influencing being within system to create dissonance. Here you can imagine astral parasites leaching onto people in power in order to influence their actions to bring discord and destruction, making other people fall into despair, thus producing food for them.

For example. Greed is fear of loss. Hoarding riches is nothing more than depletion of your own kinsmen from possibilities, which feeds the despair of



helplessness, which in turn leads to emission of dark emotions, which is nothing more than transmuting what is high energy portion of emotions of soul, into their low energy counterpart. Like preparing inedible food to be consumable.

You don't know where does it come from, why do you carve it so much, why is it so compelling to stomp upon others, but let me tell you, these are not entirely your own thoughts. Simple and unaware mind is easy to manipulate. The more evil and atrocious, the more dissonant it is for world around, and because of that, it brings more food for the dark entities. And it is easier for them to take control.





A: Righteous or wicked is merely a point of view. Each culture develops different approaches to everything. Look at Tau or Eldar. Or Imperium. None is right or wrong. It is just one of infinite possible manifestation of eternity. Go to other galaxies or timeline and see trillions of different combinations of those behaviors.

A: I don't judge people. Even those like you. Precisely because I already know and understand.

A: Cognitive dissonance. Nobody likes to have their worldview challenged. Nobody wants to admit they were wrong. OH, Holy God Emperor, forbid I was ever not immaculate or infallible!

A: How are you supposed to know, if there is no one to tell you the truth. How are you supposed to learn if there is no source of knowledge. How are you supposed to know propaganda from truth if you only hear bullshit. How are you supposed to know that all your world is a lie if you never had anyone challenging this lie. Even if 100 trillion people believe in a lie it is still a lie. Acting upon lie does not bring proper results. How are you supposed to learn if you don't even know you can learn. How do you break out of conditioning if you don't even know what is conditioning. How can you know there is another way if nothing different is ever permitted to exist?

A: Warp might manifest it into "reality" but it still YOUR interpretation, based on lack of knowledge. You just think you know, never putting this set of information under proper scrutiny to check if it false or not.

A: If you knew, you would be able to reproduce the effect and create it by yourself. And I ain't seeing that.

A: I can do this all day. To me most important is that you do your job properly, not if you like me. And it seems like there is no one else to shed a bit of light over your superstitions.

A: Inquisitor or not, it doesn't take away actions you have done. It was still done in ignorance.

Upon discoveries of ancient tech, we made sure to seal place for everyone, including other inner circle parties. It was too dangerous to let anyone near it. It wasn't end of the problem due to lack of person who could explain and implement this into current mode of knowledge. Someone who couldn't even grow a toad in a lab wouldn't be able to design and create completely new human being. Edmund might have been smart guy, but he was instructed how to implement that information into his work. Even then, how was he able to actually implement all this knowledge. The more we knew about this situation, the more bizarre it looked like. None of us knew what game he really played.

First of all, someone had an interest in creating new human bodies. It wasn't merely doll creation from the very beginning. Secondly, someone actually knew how to do it, but passed that knowledge to the brotherhood as clandestine teachings. Thirdly, there was a whole damn repository of ancient knowledge, which up to my opinion, was the most closely resembling what I have been thought by Father. And there was only one place containing such advanced knowledge.

The only lead we now had was this SIN guy. There was still a mountain of papers left along multiple data slates, so we still had a long way. Unfortunately,



we had to have more people, because this would just take forever, while opposing parties made their move.

Kaifas brought another techpriest with his servitors, who sped up our search by whooping power. I don't remember his name now, as I met him only two times. It was enough to help with all remaining digital information.

Some slates stored information about "new" interplanetary propulsion drive that used electro-gravimetric system of space warping. Methods of production, requirement technologies, additional, integument technologies that made possible to manufacture machines to build it, even layouts of compounds of shipyards to outfit starships back then. Magnetic propulsion drive was a mass cancellation technology, about which Father once told me. They were not implemented en mass, because the nature of magnetic drive is dependent upon magnetic field of star. Something made on planet Earth might have reduced capabilities in other star systems or interplanetary void. It was implemented in local navy's forces as fast attack scout craft could utilize it without problems around magnetosphere of star. According to him, it was promising anti-gravity technology at first, but humanity couldn't come up with process of adjusting the engine to various star fields and void, on the fly. Warp travel still remained, almost exclusive, as most common transport route. He told me it was fairly safe to use it in time of dark age of technology. In Black Library I learned why.

Documents had no weaponry blueprints attached. Few common goods items were explained, including short range, as for whom, communication device using gravity muon tunneling for lagless transfer of data between access points, across hundreds of light years range. This on the other hand, had a problem of requiring molecular crystal lattice technology of element that was not available in current time. I heard about from father. Polymorphic titanium alloy was crystalline structure crated in zero-g foundries at Lagrangian points in Sol system before the collapse. It had wonderful properties of being infinitely strong when reinforced by electromagnetic vortex fields. Reinforcing atomic structure. Material could be molded on atomic level by strong gravity fields. It was similar to crystalline data storage technology, writing trinary code in 3D lattice over industrially grown quartz crystals.

Now, it was clear where did their advancements came from. With the technological data cataloged and behind us, which took another two days of work. We could then seal them away to be processed later by appropriate parties, and maybe implemented into industry. Kaifas declared nobody except them should know of this material, least we risked complete invasion by Forgeworld. Nothing could stop Mechanicus from obtaining this data. He exaggerated a bit in my opinion, but to put others at ease, we made, I made a special order to seal content of these data slates until further notice. Frederick proposed to bargain with forgeworld for it, but Kaifas had doubts if Lokinyth would just bargain or send feet to retrieve it.

Next step was to shuffle through all the scrolls, which contained deliberate work of madness. Nothing new to add there. It is all strictly about different rituals and methods. Nothing about purpose of it though.

What I can describe briefly, had description of appropriate building of a place, setup of room, binding techniques and . . . what to do with victim. Very minute details describing timing, tools, actions, ceremony, items, layout, even how to create proper furniture for gathered audience, materials used, explanation



why these materials must be used. Black mass from A to Z. Different events need different “participants”. Age, descent, sex, hair and eye color, even height had a meaning in every instance. Its purpose explained as well. There are instructions how to setup proper holding houses for conditioning these sacrifices, long before they are brought in front of an altar. Even How to acquire them in first place. Where to look, how to invite, how to apprehend, how to bind, how to treat, how to dress, how to “teach” their role.

No, not every rituals ends in death. I described it before - those energies are useful only if person goes through psychological terror. Pain of body would incur in some instances distortion of those energies. But most, of course, would end in drinking blood of the terrorized victim and later, eating their flesh. This is an aphrodisiac for dark entities which are latched to soul.

Even if soul would be gone, the residue of the energies that were expressed, still remained stored in body. Like cuisine you add to meal. Some of the scrolls advised to eat it raw, even as ... that someone was still alive, to taste the greatest potency.

Drugs were prohibited. Although there was no given reason, I would surmise it it because any medicaments distort auric field. This in turn dilutes flow of soul essence. And in this case, quality of dense energies.

Most of captured personnel was to serve as willing slaves to the brotherhood. Methods of mind control were described as well. From what I deducted, from the scrolls, it was obvious that majority of present audience would be servants of the order. Those, who would make use of it, were only few. All of the serfs were supposed to be controlled, and they would actually perform the ritual, while the wretched scum engaged themselves with multiple partners in orgy on the side.

There was that scroll, which we labeled as SC-035, that explained how to take care of the long term slaves so they would not break from conditioning, and keep them willing to serve. There was a mentioning about healing those, who were not killed in rite. According to author, long term torturees were much more efficient than random, mass sacrificial pits. It was about quality of extracted essence, not about volume.

As for ultimate purpose, there was no clue in sight. There are numerous ways of affliction and extraction, but no collection. 4 days later, we logged the scrolls and packed them into cases.

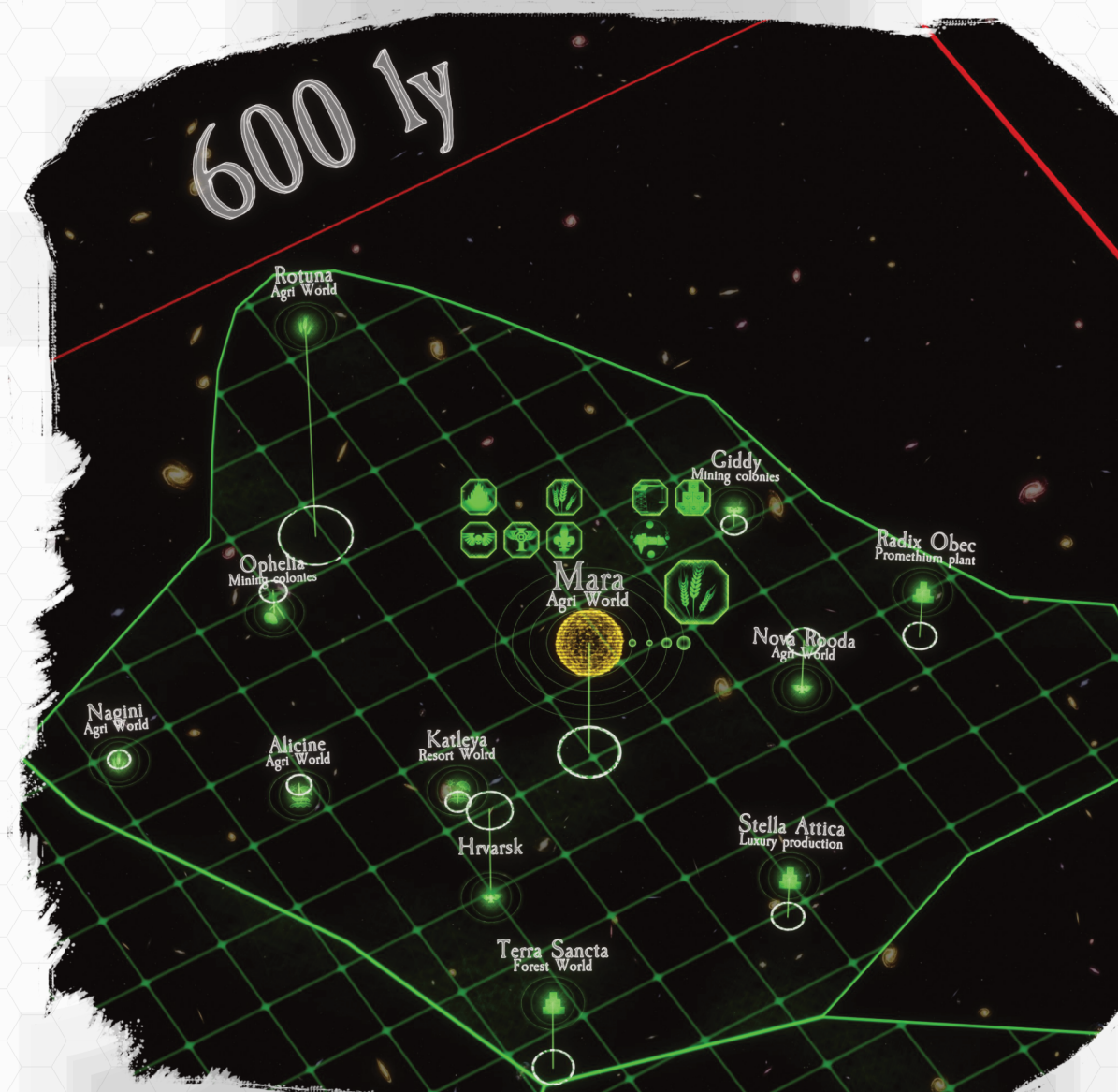
As for the stack of books, I needed a lot of staff to get through it. I asked Synthia to lend me some of sisters for few days. Sure, she was not happy to lend me a hand, but it was her damn duty to do so. 24 sisters of Order Dialogus.

In next 12 days we received much needed help from them. It felt awkward to work in there. I just hoped every minute that they don't go around spewing litanies to the Emperor and dragging me into it.

Our research went smoothly. I think that “Revered Mother” instructed to keep their faith to themselves, and make their presence strictly business. Kaifas had some reliable underlings to make cataloging efficient. While somebody took care of perusing mountain of papers, I had opportunity to teach Maroo about logistics and resource management on large scale. We had to go through a lot since he was totally green. Frederick had to attend more important matters of whole government. Due to how administration was running under Amschel, a lot



of people just have been placed in positions not suiting their competence. Commissar aimed to change it.





— Arrival Day [66_] — Pursuit day [52_] — Day of reign [20_] —

On the last day of this unfair fight, Synthia, in company of Amelia, came to hear the results for themselves. As it turned out, different authors have provided discrepancies and outright contradiction to each other, as sessions were written down, so final conclusions couldn't be hundred percent precise.

Once whole search was finally done, we nicely tidied whole cart, parked it under window and prepared library for closed presentation.

Kaifas operated noosphere for better visualization and evidence. I stood in front, telling whole story. Maroo, Synthia, Leonida, Amelia and Frederick sat in chairs. I decided Nataniel should know as well, to better understand my needs inside palace. Also, someone had to serve tea and cakes.

From the very beginning, notion of interplanetary consortium was just a pipe dream for members of previous generations, although they really did try their best to usurp power from the legal government through economic manipulation. It was LONG before current state of the world.

Story goes that if Amelia Alastor had not helped to uncover the shady dealing of ars nobilite at the break of the centuries, it would fall pray to the power hungry privateers behind the scene. Back in year 880, it was last time when a governor was properly acknowledged, in full legal method of lex imperialis, with proper backing of Order Famulous. Few months after establishment, secret group of special interest surfaced forth, as a scandal, involving slave trade, stained name of the governor at that time. I can only speculate, that it was all setup, since the same people, who let it leak into the public, offered the resolution to use their influence to have the nasty rumors go away. By year 882 nobody remembered about this side business of the governor. In return, those figures were given pass conduct for “free trade” in sector, and exemption from taxes, which of course was compensated by taxing rest of population.

First meeting of secret society undergone in basement of a brothel in Elkor, no name given, just a mentioning. One of the conspirators was father of Ervin. Yes, guy essentially had it deep in his blood. Quite literally. If sources are to be believed, family Von Rosette had governor on the throne, at date M40. 863, and on the day of second nuclear civil war, he was blown up by rebels, who didn't take kindly to his approach to freedom. Damn irony . . . It begun period of unparalleled age of devastation and horror that kept each side fighting for over thousand years with all arsenal at their disposal. One of the books described small scale, pocket nuclear devices, as used in casual bombing runs. . . . Yeah, just fucking fun to be alive.

How shocked were the sisters to uncover such tainted chapter in history. It was due to burning books and rewriting history by Amschel's government. True history was the first victim of coup. Secret police of behind the scene group, who was fronted by governor, made sure every scholar followed suit.

Logs, form time of great war, indicated a whooping 75% reduction in population, that resulted in almost 13 000 000 000 lives lost, in comparison to state of pre-war civilization. Planet wide devastation did not stop oligarchs to squeeze last drop of life from citizens. In year 905.M40, first official group was registered, in conglomerate, under name of some noble house. They were active



rulers of the government, with father Louie at the helm. I don't remember details, it was unimportant.

Soon, they were kicked out of consortium they helped to establish. Reason given is that they simply were not clever enough to anticipate internal revolt. It helped to fuel fire between two remaining camps. Those who had authority and those who had actual economic power. By 899.M41, economic nobility had a war going on between arbitrary created “secession states” to weaken the standing of governor, who was proved incompetent in keeping population in peace. Creating problem to sell resolution. New governor was to be chosen from between the conspirators to ensure fatal grip on the planet, but as history had it, soldier Amelia Alastor had broken all their plans. In resulting changes secret society had acquired no additional power and even more, lost some of the business to raids and consolidation of workforce. Whole plan backfired at them spectacularly even if they were not unmasked.

Here, enters the SIN. As hard as he could, Ervin doubled and tripled in his effort to bring forth the empire his father had imagined, but as low class entrepreneur at that time, all he could afford was security company. Although low class for them meant that they had more resources than cities in the desert, it wasn't enough to overtake anyone, since there were corporations already in place, far bigger than his father's ever was. Not to mention that he inherited this mess just as 17 year old boy. He was out of ideas and out of know-how. Most notably out of experience his father had in warfare.

During year 923.M41, which was explicitly underlined, a solitary masked man, met him on his journey through Western Great Desolates. Being so weirdly clothed, he grabbed attention of people passing by. It wasn't style of Gothic Imperium, nor noble elegance, but more like fantasy, legends and stories. Smooth, arching trimmings out of place and out of time. Very neat and simple, yet extravagant and rich. Like faerie wizard. Black cloak in the desert was last thing you'd want to wear. Strange, silver embroidery on the back of the cloth were not recognizable. It was not heraldry nor any language. Intriguing indeed. Even so that priest of the town did not react to the stranger.

Masked and hooded, but not hiding at all, strolling in plain sight in the middle of sidewalk, strange figure looked around for something. Much taller than most people, his head dress gave off weird vibes. Green crystals embedded in silver sockets on arm guards looked like from a knightly themed theater. Luck had it, that Ervin just missed opportunity for good defense contract in the city, and was not in the mood for stranger meeting. According to his testimony, dark silhouette had a soothing effect on him. As he sat in the transporter, alongside employed census, SIN approached him as one of the representatives of organization that would benefit from his cooperation. Least to say, that Blacklight already had reputation for being ruthless, barbaric mercenaries who get the job done no matter the resistance met. It made Von Rosette family loose some, win some, and kept growth of company on small, but steady rise. Yet far too little to take over the world.

Proposition was very straightforward, to meet him at another place, another time to discuss details. Three days later, at abandoned chapel in some of the North Expansion's ghost cities, three representatives of Society of Sovereign met him and two of his bodyguards. Weird and clandestine people wore the same garments as SIN, with exception of cloak's color being purple. Secretive meeting



was not something out of place for him, but the request of “escorting” delicate shipment of goods, certainly. As stated in his own words, “the creepy goons were in tight spot to call upon him for such trivial task”. Whatever that shipment was, its value was too great to let it slip. And worthy enough to employ whole company of mercs to protect it. The number of chests filled with precious gems and gold they r in return could not fit trucks they had.

Cargo was already in place, at the back of transporter SIN had provided. It's destiny was not known, but only clue we had was subsector Krill, which lies about 200 light years away from Mara. Of course, Von Rosette did not share any details with his associates, but due to this gig he was able afford a destroyer from the shipyard. Taking in consideration that this was best, which local authorities allowed for private holdings, it meant business. In later books it was told that he bought up some of the officers who made special equipment go missing, but as to contents only hints of heavy armor was provided.

In next few years of cooperation with SIN, he learnt how to setup a rogue cell to create unrest and upraise, to later be contracted to quell it. Another few years and 933 pops up. It was on his 39th birthday, that Ervin decided to expand his works outside mercenary business. He had very successful company that was quite popular within PDA, Little with military but virtually not among nobility, which signified not so great profits. To change this he either had to infiltrate upper class or become one himself.

With help of SIN, he managed to reform his ideas and grew from back alley mercenary into first class front line knight of justice. Yeah..... we all love knights of justice. What a load of bollocks.

In addition, he managed to get in contact with merchant magnate Marcus de Estana, who was one of multiple large suppliers and owned considerable freighter fleet in subsector.

Logs do not hold any specific date or place but we could infer that somewhere near year 935 there was a large war with religious extremists on northern hemisphere near Agal Plains. In confusion of war, as tens of thousands of combatants were dying every day for almost a month, he managed to salvage imperial knight with help of mysterious man and his entourage. He painted it as Blacklight but operator was one of SIN's man. All of shadow figures wore some kind of head dress and hood that obscured face, so it was impossible to say who it was. Princep proved to be on the whole new level of capabilities than any knight could ever dream, pushing mobility and accuracy to uncanny precedents. Few skirmishes after, he struck a deal with local nobles to clear out rebels nest, which earned him a new level of reputation. Three months after, he personally led attack on “enemy” headquarters inside Gollip mountain ridge without any help of military. Thanks to tricks which with SIN equipped him and unstoppable knight, he wiped out whole base with minimum casualties. It was first mentioning of using arcane powers to influence enemies.

If you ask me, it was some form of psychic powers. From the way it was written in logs it was obvious he didn't do it himself, but had a help from elsewhere. I cannot say where it actually was. It goes without saying, that certain parts of his offense were omitted. No one outside command knew that he didn't pilot knight himself. Everyone was told that it was him and his acute sense of strategy that won this war.



Everyone fell for that. Even spies of shadow government. In his eyes, whatever SIN was doing behind his back was working like a charm. No pun intended. Large scale propaganda posted Blacklight as crusaders of justice, who deliver Emperor's wrath upon enemies of mankind second only to Space Marines, who were of course not present in quite few hundred light years, so no one could actually gauge their performance. Which to say was extremely exaggerated, but ratings of Ervin skyrocketed both as a person and as a businessmen. Administratum had judged his performance as knight and decided that even though it would be a sacrilege in normal circumstances, appropriate title was bestowed upon him.

Next few years have provided him with a boom of wealth, as he expanded BL into security department. New associates in noble circles, unimaginable wealth, women, parties, honors and waning ego would effectively stop his desire to climb up. This was very unwanted turn of events for his collaborator. SIN had to reinvigorate his desire to top the world. To achieve that, he had to show him actual content of the cargo he delivered to various places from time to time, which at first had opposite effect. He would not dare to say exactly what it was, but it had to do something with child sacrifice.

My take on it is, that what was transported were not children themselves, but artifacts this cult was so obsessed with, used in those rituals. And it would not get approved by inquisition. . . .

Child traffic is something that's common in Imperium for variety of reasons and scopes and I'm sure he did human traffic numerous times already. But heresy . . . that's something different altogether. Simple death sentence would not do justice.

Few sessions where Von Rosette reminiscences those moments, his phrasing changes dramatically into very defensive and set back. It is clear that he was afraid of those connections. In later books it was said that he either had to choose cooperation or removal. Once he choose the earlier, his companion showed him the wondrous world of infinite capabilities that psychic powers brought. He couldn't tap into them himself, but was provided with some aftereffects. Mainly the empowerment and rejuvenating that came from dark rituals. By summer of 937 he performed his first rite, and from that time, once again desired to top the world.

As you know, these unholy rituals really do harvest life force of the victim. It does invigorate and empower physical body in form of extending one's auric field temporarily by hijacking sacrifice's vitality. Euphoria and unparalleled ecstasy are byproducts of the process. Once hooked into it, it becomes addictive to destructive degrees. Most of all, it destroys coherency of one's soul matrix which leads to reliance on replenishing it via external means. The moment someone tries it, it's already too late and downfall spiral begins. Even once is enough to destabilize astral body integrity. If you keep on doing it, you get very lavish and long life, if not . . . you will fall apart in few days due to drought. And land into lap of she who thirsts. Ervin was hooked in instantly, never really knowing the consequence.

Effects were devastating for planet. Up till now, SIN had no competent pawn in his hand to facilitate overthrow. His words. Time between 937 and 952 was very sluggish for this plan. Capital gathered by BL's mercs had to be appropriately divided into acquiring other branches. Even if they had supply and



could create demand for war, they had to control industry itself, which meant taking over production facilities, rearranging contracts, undermining competition or illegal operations to set them up. A lot of work has been put into propaganda to acquire vox populi among mechanicus and ecclesiarchy. Obviously a lot of effort was put into bribing officials to let their funky business alone. Everything changes once Edmund enters the stage in 954. With his guidance, conspiracy launched into new golden era. With his insights into cloning they would sell some part of the batch on slave market. At first it wasn't all that good. According to Edmund's testimony, the creation of bioroid container fit for delivery would take 22 years to complete. Once it has been completed, Olsmo was designated as someone who could keep their interest intact. He was young, naive, idealist commissar who did as he was told. Perfect brainwashing technique used on him during early black site projects finally bore fruit.

Once von Rosette returned to the front row, mentioning of SIN become scarce. Only the inner circle knew his purpose in organization, but never his true identity. Reitziger had talked most about interactions with him, as knowledge how to grow even more perfect bodies befitted him the most. What was written in scrolls, was an attempt of geneticist to systematize that knowledge of esoteric into physical curriculum. As I mentioned before regarding scrolls – they were missing key parts. Mountain of books did not provide clue if that was whole knowledge. To remedy that, shadow brokers have arranged a truce with Adeptus Biologis Kaifas, who came from Lokinyth to establish a new experimental sites on fringe systems to measure progress of human genome. Or it's decay. He was introduced in 958 as a side asset who would provide pure gene samples. In return he would be promised head position at local Cult Mechanicus institutions, becoming Magos Biologis.

Around time of 965 a new scholar enters stage. Amschel Martens, a young man of age 26 is rising in academia of schola progenium as a interpreter of imperial truth at a different angle of vision. This begins to stir a big stinky pile of . . . manure . . . in then, current, ladder of power. Some of the people in the know were already siding with Society of Sovereign. Breaking status quo among populace would only lead into another break or revolution, which was unacceptable. New way of thinking was to be done away with. But instead of outright killing, he was approached and probed to see if he could be used in another way. Agents of de Estana family have managed to buy him as another propaganda piece. Back then, he was a very greatly admired man who collided with residing doctrines to help people unshackle their fates. After this transition, he gradually shifted in favor of corporations, becoming very vociferous about “need” for complex and centralized power structure, which ultimately led him to become a front man for organization, helping in becoming the Governor.

Coup was entirely different story as one might expect. At first, no one had the audacious idea to challenge the well rooted power that was present that day. The forces of soldiers they got from clandestine operations in black sites were measured only in thousands, not in millions. At first, they tried to simply control production of goods by wealth, but competition in form of noble bloodlines was too well established to overtake whole market. Not to mention administration scribes logged everything in detail.

Making a dent was all they could afford. It was not until Amschel and Kaifas got along and begun to talk to people in prominent positions, like then Elkor Hive



overseer. Before coup, office was responsible for much more than it is now. At least on paper. The propagation of centralized power served Revus Aminikus in great length, even before appearance of Borrod. With both of them infiltrating capital and its ruler, it was only a matter of time before they could sway him to join SoS. With new connections, he would give more and more biased freedom to his new friends and deny it to former allies.

With help of his shiny Blacklight, city was quickly overtaken and by 968 each and every, according to him, large production facility belonged to consortium they created, which gave them unprecedented capabilities of fixing prices for goods and requisition exchange rate. Poverty and taxation reform only added fuel to fire. By mid 969 false flag insurgencies were scattered across planet, with few gaining momentum. Reitziger advised Von Rosette to use hive city to overthrow governor. In few days after fights in lower levels of Elkor, Blacklight marched at governor's palace. Few people inside knew that behind fancy dresses and armors of mercenaries human were scarce to find. Most of mobilized units were fresh recruits from black projects, with remaining cadre composed of deadly super soldiers provided by Edmund and SIN.

Thanks to confusion, overseer Revus instilled into ranks of soldiers in few days prior, almost none headed back to defend governor. BL dealt with garrison in matter of two hours and whole building was under occupation, as well as Ervin's command. Few days of purges and new governor was introduced. Of course, it was done like the people themselves would choose one, by “common vote”. Mockery of illusion of choice. A radiant figure in academics who was prompting changes of old ways would be proposed to public and later, in spite of “majority” of advisory body choosing against him, was placed on the throne. None of his ties were known, and to soothe public resistance, taxation reform was canceled and new decade of prosperity announced. Sudden loosing of the nook gave population few years of relief. Except it did not.

Edmund devised a plan and fed it to Ervin. Just year after taking over reins of the world, new false flag was caused on south hemisphere. Few nuclear strikes ordered by governor decimated cities of revolutionists, which coincided with destruction of SoS competitors' greatest assets. Such a coinkidinky. In one fellow swoop, SoS managed to kill any resistance towards its supremacy. Being tickled by SIN with ever expanding possibilities, Ervin backed from nothing just to get rid of any opposition. In next year, he would order Crimson Raiders, a side offshoot of his black operations, to overtly raid mansions of industrial enemies and get rid of them in most effective way. It brought much attention to the society itself as more and more people were questioning mysterious gangs raiding wealthy people.

Many of the insiders expressed doubt in Ervin's abilities to lead and voted within ranks to hand over the future planning to someone else, who would get the job done without attracting unnecessary attention. He didn't take kindly to this kind of accusation. By next day, first of many waves of purges would be exposed by justice service of the governance investigators. Most of inner circle was thrown at a sacrifice ground to be judged in public. All non essential minions of lower tier were outright killed. With iron fist, he took back control of secret organization in just a few days by utilizing Amschel's authority. Terrorized participants fell in line like domino pieces.

It didn't however stop the rampage. It went on for a whole year, after which



killing fervor started to die out. Tens of thousands of conspirators were removed with all of their assets being pulled into von Rosette's conglomerate, until it became too large to manage on his own. At the same time new unrest begun to surface in major cities, as personal trampling was reaching it's zenith. Once again, sly fox Edmund soothed masses by bringing new player to the table. Amelia Alastor was approached and inspected if she fit the position. Now being an old granny, offering of a new youth was too much to pass on, so few weeks after she stood on the pedestal once again, combating inequality with barrage of vague statements at the day of St. Ververcht in 974. She was indeed deeply troubled by it as we read the results. I know we could just ask, but I would doubt sincerity of those confessions.

People saw this as sign of change and fell into place once again. To further amend situation, war hero in name of Olsmo was brought forth in 976 to become their insurance policy. Unaware of the plot, he vowed secrecy and obedience to the governor. And there was the key trick – everyone would vow to governor, not to the lex imperialis or Emperor.

With this setup they carried their reign with little opposition in both economic and authoritative power. But it was not over yet. There were still some parts of planet that recessed into small communities. Almost one third of districts were opposed to the autocratic dictatorship. It made consortium very aggressive in hostile takeovers until Black Ships came to port, seeking to fulfill the tithe. Investigation uncovered whole plot in mere few days. In height of the skirmish, Sororitas visited palace to sneak upon conspirators to gather evidence. A firefight broke out when Sister Synthia was invited by oblivious vice-governor and heard enough to outright purge them. Inquisition does not play around, but they did not know just how tough super soldiers were. And how many were there. Almost half an hour later and stacks of bodies choking vast corridors later, sisterhood was mowed down to last one. Synthia was easy to convince as her age, similarly to Amelia, was advanced. Von Rosette even promised to deal with overseeing inquisitor, himself. I suppose he could not trust this matter to anyone else. Or rather anyone else than to the fatso. Small fleet and a whooping one hundred tons of gold were enough to let this incident pass.

A: There was no mentioning of how their alliance was forged, only what he paid.

A: Synthia herself wasn't in loop. At least that's what she said.

A: Just Edward Mendaz. Not sure if even Synthia knew if this was real name or not.

A: There were no records about what transpired between them. I don't know why he accepted.

Moreover, he expressed his collaboration if an opportunity would rise. With such setup they had open path to freedom. Even inquisitor had their back if necessary, in addition to now promoted canoness Synthia as permanent resident of the world, who begun to take over local leadership over Sororitas branches. Two years later, movement of this front was advanced enough, that Blacklight were main military contractor for government, and alongside other corporations, a monopoly for technocracy. Once year 981 passed, new installment on the inner



circle, the obedient dog Jhiddu became his main man for controlling agri business, he then turned to stars to make himself a name. In 4 next years, he managed to instigate coup on two other planets and put his puppets on the thrones of Rotuna system, which is also big agri world.

One of those places was Lokinyth III, ice planet rich in raw ore, which was scarcely populated but had thriving mining operations, supplying forgeworld on Lokinyth II. Tapping into its business allowed him to get hold on few cruiser class ships to incorporate into fleet and ultimately enabled him for a complete takeover of the remaining fields of planet Mara in 985. By that time, world had completely succumbed to darkness and depravity Amschel pushed onto population, plunging it into totalitarian dystopia for next 15 years. In time, BL managed to infiltrate majority of the sector's command and SoS became sole ruler of the 14 planets of the subsector by 990. During his shadow king reign, Ervin built a staggering amount of weaponry for segmentum battalions. Enough units, that some of techpriests at the manufactorum CM knew his name along fabricator general of Lokinyth. As governor I would later learn that Mara, or rather forge world Lokinyth, which is production center of whole sector, exported over 31 billion tons of armaments to Segmentum for 2 tithes. Mostly small firearms, standard issue items, substitute parts and mass produced personal armor. Overall infantry gear.

In the boom of the arms dealing, brotherhood managed to conquer dozens of lesser worlds to incorporate into the trading empire. Although those planets weren't as closely invigilated or restricted, citizens were drowned in burdens. Synthia held a helm of change “in the name of The Emperor”.

As far as SIN is considered, since 974 he appears very sporadically and only in words of others. Last, in person appearance in SoS was around 965, after which he moves to shadows. Little knowledge of his actions has been displayed by members, but everyone still thought he was the pivotal figure. Especially old Ervin. If there was any mention of his mentor, then it was only in tandem with their wretched practices. Logs did not provide any concrete data upon what it was. Even in inner circle they did not talk about sensitive work. There was one phrase that depicted possible reasons for SIN's operation, which would be slave gathering. I am sure it was a solid one, but one of many. Last log of any gathering ends in 993, as at that time Edmund rebuked Ervin for his shortsightedness enough to stop meeting at all. Apparently Reitziger knew very well how his shenanigans on such scale would catch eye of Inquisition sooner or later.

A: Nope, nothing after. At least not in the set we had at our disposal.

A: Then you should ask sisters who helped with documents.

A: Good luck finding them after the purges . . .

Another person who interested me was fatso. As I mention before, post certain point in history, he was the main contact of SIN due to ongoing experiments. It was very explicit that he needed a perfect “container”. What for? How? What did it even mean? Nothing of this nature have been disclosed. Not as humans see it. To him, what we call sex appeal had no real merit. It was about



proper genetic unlocking. Yes. Not enhancing but unlocking, which would roughly correspond to teachings of my Father. According to Emperor, human genome already possessed everything we call God genes, but these alleles are chemically locked away. Those DNA molecule structures serve as spirit receiver, allowing to draw higher energetic structures from aether. In telegraphic short – 95 % are not used in building body structure. And these locks are very specific. Reason why Space Marines were created in . . . “enhanced” way, was to emphasize certain specific qualities while keeping others still . . . dormant? I Guess. For Father, progress never comes from the outside. Unlike Custodes, who were created to develop all fields of their being, Marines were supposed to be blunt tool of strength. We once talked about Men of Thunder, how undiluted, raw power which one cannot control, corrupts our thoughts and soul.

DNA is like antenna. It has its specific frequency rate. It both sends and receives information which cannot be seen in simple spectrum of magnetic field we call visible light. That's what astral body is for. We call it like that because we do not have words for it. Lexicon has several terms for it but each has different connotation to layer and function. From what I heard from scientists in laboratories, Emperor was not fully unlocked but had roughly 55-65 % genetic utilization. And as we see, it was enough to become the mightiest psyker in galactic existence. From what I heard, display of power is not function of mutation but psychic powers are result of a soul who has reached greater consciousness and is able to manifest itself in more . . . creator way – commanding powers of the world using body as a medium. Mute the medium and null the power. Physical mutation, like 3rd eye are crude, ad hoc manifestation based on lacking understanding of the soul, like attaching something to already existing thing, rather than designing it from beginning. Or recreating it to fit the purpose.

Similar case was brewing with mysterious monk - he needed specimen perfectly tailored for a purpose, which is not disclosed at all. My guess was Edmund did not care at all about this reasoning, only about end effect. Here is where a project named Black Betty comes into execution. After some tweaking and adjusting bioroid form, he decided to take few steps forward and create completely new template. And that was allegedly BB. Completely new line of genome, that according to his boastful venting, was the pinnacle of genetic perfection. Last log mentioning bioroids was from 961 and by that time this project was still in planning only. Taking into consideration that he seemingly perfected this project in mere two days after meeting me, he had to had everything underway at some other site. Or . . . I don't know.

We managed to get our hands on some more material corresponding to person BB with whom Reitziger had connections. Very vague statements about actual relationship was written in one of letters. From its content, we knew they were very close associates. Both of them had interest in genetics and sought after eternal life. Letters wrote in enigmatic way, with buzzwords only in the loop would understand.

A: Yes, we weren't able to distinguish which gender BB is.

A: Know-how about operating this machinery was provided by Edmund. How and when to grow new bodies was as well. Laboratories were exclusively run by Reitziger.



A: Nah, Kaifas saved us a lot of trouble and time by confessing upfront whatever he knew about this projects. Although I was never able to fully trust him or his work regarding data slates, I had to take what I could.

A: Those vids were destroyed along my old PDA. I never intended to use them anyway.

Von Rosette, above everything else, would not tolerate disobedience. It was described many times, that incompetent ones were pardoned some things as long as they were good servants. But no matter how brilliant and useful you were, questioning your superior got you killed. Even if he himself was only half as smart as he thought. Without Reitziger or SIN, he would be living in desert slums. One thing you cannot say about mad scientist, is that he was stupid. Everything he undertook in long run was perfectly calculated, even in unexpected situations. So much, it begged question how was he able to do anything without even one implant.

A: Hehe, yeah . . .

A: How about you don't. They wanted to know what led to this . . . catastrophe. If you tell them, they won't understand the why.

A: For you, it might be a story, but I was there, I -I. . . made it happen . . .

A: So you want to hear me or watch the vids?

It showed through near perfect timing of supply lines he devised for underground operations, made in collaboration with mechanicus' new heretek machines, which worked in quite different sets of physics. Then, he built his own battle group escort and employed his own super soldiers to man them, without expanding CR operations. And he made near perfect schedules for routes. Logs detailed some losses to unknown phenomena that star drives experienced, anticipated around 5-7 % losses. He setup and designed every black site himself, with programs and tools he created himself. Man was beyond genius indeed. He even managed to reverse engineer and duplicate old VATS organic chambers and repurpose them. I couldn't distinguish how much of it was his own intellect and how much SIN's assistance, but even so, as far and wide I traveled stars, this was on par with Artisan Fabricator General. And he was 100% flesh.

There are few dates in logs. Most of it we had to put together by pairing them with happenings of other accounts. Most plentiful were the oldest ones.

Stories begun in 955 as he helped to setup first black site at Akeno. It was his first project in which he would try to enhance soldiers. Although victims is more appropriate. He was the director of base and was not seen by experiment staff. In his spare time he would “innovate”. Black site was perfect place for that. Two years later project was canceled. BL did not have enough resources to justify such huge resource dump for long. It made Edmund rethink his approach and create more efficient modes of operation. Ship travel was next endeavor on which he focused, to create most efficient supply line. With some on the lost technology



at his disposal, and SIN's assistance, he conjured impulse generator drive that worked like anti-gravity engine. I already covered that.

What he did next was to redesign resource processing facilities. If I am to believe records, he just went and did it. He did not have to think through anything, he just designed it from top of his head and it would work like a charm by first time in it's greatest capacity. In one of the letters to Kaifas he described it as a connection to the Omissiah.

A: Well . . . If I was to dive deeper into that concept of Omissiah, then I could say he was right and wrong at the same time. There is one source of creation and technically . . .

Lines

10579-10586

Lost due to recording data corruption

Whatever the case, he felt clarity of mind all the time. Even as on-floor manager, he was able to adapt to new arising situations without any problem. He knew how to efficiently operate his laboratory or military forces. In spare time tutoring Amschel on politics.

By year 960 he had designed and fleshed out his next black project. None of the logs say where it is or how it was setup. He mentions it only because someone provoked his ego. It was about how sloppy his last endeavor was, which corresponds to mining facility at Mara's North pole. Whether it really was, I have no idea. Another research station was setup at Akeno. Old one was left untouched. Thanks to new star drive system, SoS hauled cargo to depo at outer cloud belt and new ships would deliver it in minutes, without need for warp travel, completely under the radar.

Schedule for new program was not going very far. Without proper equipment all he could do is to inject gene therapeutic drugs to forcefully unlock genetics of test subjects. It didn't work long-term and it was valid only as long as subject was dosed with drugs. Systems were naturally rejecting these chemical spills. By the 965, damage was done and program shifted to secret training facility. Edmund's job was over and he returned to Mara to help with designing new genetic crops. It went on for next five years.

Instead of using existing specimen as base, Reitziger decided to create from scratch, on molecular level. After 5 years of nothingness, Ervin's patience has finally run dry and cut off founding. Edmund finally created his first, and some considered it the best, flower specimen Mara had to offer, in mere month. Carmen Rosalie. I don't know it's taxonomy, but such was name given it by Edmund. This Rose stood almost 6 feet tall with chalice as great as human head. Its petals had vibrant dark hue of crimson with bio luminescent ridges. Especially at dusk and dawn they would amaze with beauty. I had occasion to marvel at them while at the governor's top floor garden, and man, are they beautiful.

Profits from selling this flower alone brought more resources than entire military industry they had in possession up to that point. It was sign of prestige and



wealth to have it in garden. Ripe for speculation and bubble. Few minor off shots of specimen were created for diversification. After project was finished, SIN turned to Reitziger directly, without any intermediaries, which made Ervin mighty jealous. With his insights about genetics, he passed knowledge that would be put to use in creation of a new soldier enhancement program. There was a matter of lack of equipment. Edmund mentioned stories about "old folk tale about ancient technology buried under neighboring star system". Once I read it myself, it sounded like he just made it the fuck up. But so skillfully, nobody sniffed a lie.

Mystery monk vowed to check it out, and in two months he brought forth knowledge of its actual existence. Now, it was a problem of extraction. Not only logistic but political as well. Stella Attica was much more politically strong in the sector's rankings due to export of luxury jewelry and overall decoration industry like fashion, furniture, architecture, etc. And since Mara did not like to cooperate in sharing resources, local nobility did not like Mara. And they would not take it lightly if a private corporation raided their world for resources. If anything, they needed to do it behind the scenes.

So, the only feasible way for them was to acquire system for themselves. SIN had few ideas, including corporate expansion in that direction. Von Rosette would simply go in force, take what they needed and be out of there. Reitziger, as always, had to provide another tactic. Takeover of the local government and planet, only then expansion. SIN loved the idea. There were some people who could help them so it took a merely 11 months to overthrow governor and install their own regime. Tome that corresponds to this session is most thick of all. Almost double the size of any other entries, as it was a very heated discussion.

A: At that time, no tome contained description of SIN. Even though people referred to him from time to time, he was enigma. Not even Alastor, Kaifas or Olsmo could tell me what it was.

With new governor installed in 969 new war helped SoS and BL taking over nearby systems, as matter of formality. Seven star systems fell in five years. When space was settling down after ridding of false pirates plaguing subsectors Empniir Eta and Kata Jay, in year 972, initiative for new black site is thrown down the drain. Instead, Reitziger is encouraged to create his own little project on the side by no one else than his mysterious buddy, which he helps to establish.

Two years later Bunker hill was built and lost technology gathered in its hideout. By 976 they had created their first cloned human container. Ervin was not impressed, but SIN was delighted to see how far they could go. In words of scientists himself, they were "very poor quality but best they could go for" at the time. Edmund managed to carve CR into his own organization and used its resources to keep up operations. Folks at peripheries did not know that clone growing and trading was a viable, sanctioned practice in mainland. I suppose Edmund . . . Edmund just gaslighted everyone to his own tune. It's hard to guess what goes in mind of such . . . Never mind.

Food experiments on populace aimed to make it more feral in nature, less thinking and more desirous of the basic needs. Whatever intellect remained in population was carefully culled by preachers and priests as unfaithful to the Emperor's doctrine, no matter what science or data showed. It helped with



gathering genetic data for Edmund's project. Which succeeded in 986. After very sporadic appearances in any kind of company, he crawled out of his hidey hole for yearly equinox celebration in company of his first complete doll. Which was Ada. . . . Specimen A1 made furious sweep in the hearts of men that evening. But nobody could even get as much as sniff of her, as fatso hung out in the royal lounge with other inner circle conspirators. It was mental game as always. And made a lot of gold on the side.

Every rare specimens have in common the price to pay for obtaining it. And that was not gold or adamantium or even auralite, but allegiance. Influence. Power. Each and every despot yearned for such unparalleled mistress at his feet. It brought new expansion possibilities without any need for costly war. If I were to believe what is written in the books, then I could say that nobility of whole segmentum desired those dolls. Yes . . . a perfect dolls. Those were not just looking good or behaving good. They were made to be the ultimate playthings.

For Ervin, long years of sinking resources down the drain were over and could finally reap benefits. The real winner was not him however. Apparently SIN was the greatest benefactor of those bioroids. Even if his share was nowhere to be seen or even hinted at, the new grown organisms have brought litany of praise onto Edmund. It is not known how many girls he did take or even if at all, but in one of the scrolls, instructions for practices indicate a modest presence of few people at most for rites to succeed.

A: I have no idea what that man could think . . .

A: Oh, Edmund. Well . . . I will leave this "thinking" part till the end. Then you can judge by yourself.

A: Synthia did not know about this. Allegedly. She knew about cloning and human trafficking but not the ritual part. Even if she lied I had no means to check it. Everything would surface later.

All in all, Reitziger would try to ever improve his creations. Most of all, to improve A1 who served as base template for all other girls. Of course, he made variety of phenotypes to suit desires of his clients. From what I read, it took about six months, to use their words, "ship goods". Depending on how they were treated, they lasted for years. One day they would just die. No sickness, illness, sudden attack or hemorrhaging, just drop dead in middle of walking. From what we uncovered, it looked like a programmed feature. Well . . . Ada for some reason was still living and was even . . . Whatever the reason, facts were that they had to be replaced every so often, which made these deals even more sinister. It looked like planned obsolescence. Very effective.

One peculiar thing left for us was letter, physical letter correspondence between Edmund and SIN. Bundled with package string, big, fat envelope stapled with blank seal held multiple letters sent in recent year between two of them. Last one dated 12.04.999.M41. The very day of my arrival.

He wrote about how grateful he was to SIN for his cooperation, and expressed vivid humbleness towards him, adding he would see him rewarded for all those years of faith. He wanted to meet him at the Black Star in four months.



Response letter, dated 23.04.999.M41, contained only "Finally. We will be there", written in very tall and loopy, decorative font. With human blood.

We could not decipher anything out of it. There is no reference to anything in this letter corresponding to data we gathered in all other stuff. As far as we were concerned, it was a dead end. At least we knew that the shadow king was still alive and reachable by letter, which meant contacting this guy was possible, although we didn't know how.

As timeline progressed more and more towards nowadays, content got more and more filled with simple bragging, tea parties than conspiracies and less value to investigation. It does show some of the facades they put up in those times, but at large the overtaking was over and it became a matter of management rather than expansion. A life of leisure and pleasure instead of strife. Subsector was conquered. 9 star systems, 14 inhabited planets, 78 colonies. 8 billion people. Everything under corporate command of one man. It wasn't anything new or . . . wrong, just reality of the Imperium. The problem lied in hoarding those riches by him and keeping it out of real economy. Still, nothing new in Imperium, but I didn't like it at all.

Even if Ervin Von Rosette had become the most influential person in subsector, he still kept to his planet and continued to scheme how to grip his power even more tightly within sector without any competitor. Just like he liked. Everyone either was with him or dead. In exception to Reitziger. These guys were always at odds with each other. One promoting intellectual growth, while other demanded strength and submission. Of course, older man had always something or someone he could call upon to complete his dirty tasks, while Edmund always preferred to do all in person. Both of them were in it for personal gains, but both of them had different goals. One wished to bring forth the empire his father dreamt about and another . . . was a mystery to us.

We went through some details and had fairly clear idea how this reworking would end up affecting planet. Of course it went a bit deeper than we anticipated, and the giant scope of what we took a fight with cooled off our initial hype.

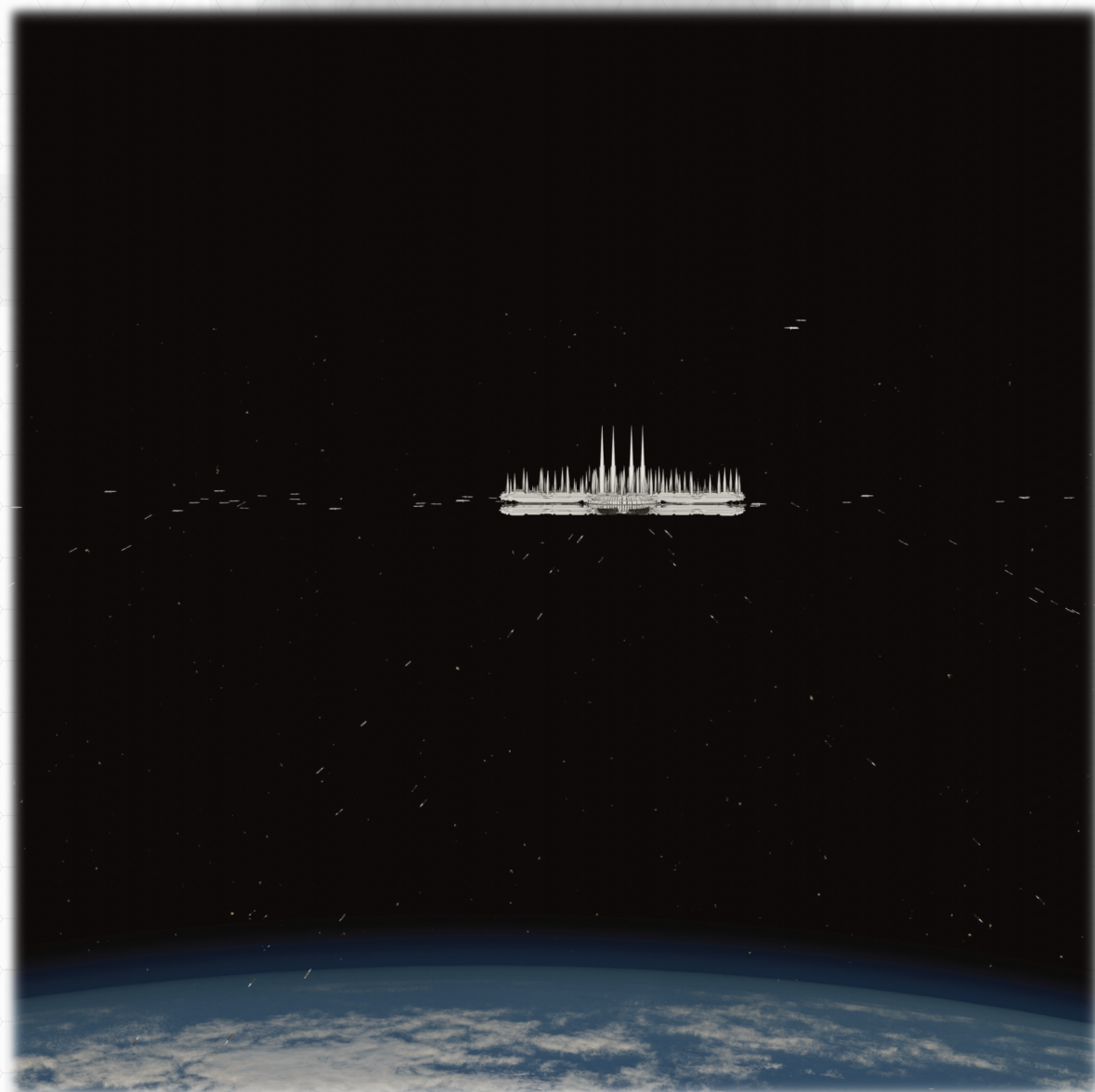
New problems arose without imminent solution and what little good faith or righteous cause remained, was overwhelmed by sheer magnitude of our struggle. And that was not Ervin's empire or SIN's shadow council.

One of the new problems was a damned nail in the coffin. Tithe was about to be collected in mere 3 weeks and from the looks of it, industry would not meet this time's quota. That would spell investigation about hows and whys. In the end, it wouldn't hurt the conspirators but the "now legitimate" governance. I did not have idea how to get this done in such short time. Even if we did agree to take on different tasks, this was way beyond anyone of those people around me.

This clandestine cult was not in power nor did it try to expand, but remained in shadows. Brewing agenda was unknown to us so we had to go with the flow. Impending tithe was more of a concern now. It simply had to be done. In searching for possible way out, we had to turn into the very organizations we wanted to get rid of. It wasn't about asking, but rapid acquisition. Kaifas had explained how our food production was even more than meeting demand, transportation effort lied mostly in private sector, and most of all, in conglomerate. Our tithe was not the worry. Lokinyth was. If our transporters couldn't deliver food, whole sector would starve. If that happened, our exports



would halt, which would launch catastrophic cascade of failures on hundreds of planets. Since it was already past midnight, I decided we would tackle this issue in the morning and went to bedroom.



— Arrival Day [67_] — Pursuit day [53_] — Day of reign [21_] —

I was awoken by ruckus engulfing whole palace. Around sunrise some kind of quiet alarm went off and put military on the guard posts. I put on some clothes and got out to ask questions. My bodyguards explained there was assassin spotted and chased away somewhere around inner gate. Which by the way isn't repaired to this day, he he he he he. . . . Yes No news about rest of the inner circle members. It wasn't all that big of a deal to me so I got back to sleep. This time I was awoken by serfs who were sent by de Estana family. It was very pressing matter and couldn't wait after breakfast. I was given a letter written by family herald Marcus, which contained notice that assassin killed two spouses of heir Tulio and managed to wound him critically. There was mentioning about other casualties and call for help to heal him. I needed to make a call to Kaifas and asked him to perform this task. Yes, asked, not ordered. He accepted and declared to be of assistance to youngster, after which I wrote a letter back. Perfect opportunity to hint him that he has allegiance to commit to.

Everyone left and I could go to sleep once more . . . but no. Half an hour later my bodyguards broke in to deliver information about sisterhood covenant uprising. Apparently sisters from Order Famulous had not taken sudden change of power so easily and would not acknowledge me as governor, which I couldn't care less about, but you know . . . public opinion and blah blah blah.

It wasn't important for me, but for everyone else on the damn planet sure it was. Well . . . Famulous seemed to be held in high regard so it actually was a force to be reckoned with at least when it came to publicity. Liked it or not, I had to get up and do something. It wasn't even 8 in the morning.

I don't really remember much from that morning but I took some of the boys and headed out towards flash point in the city. We traveled in civilian convoy to avoid suspicions of marshal law.

Sergeant stopped our truck near entrance to big town square, a center of preaching symposium for special occasions. As one would have in top layers, massive arches cast shadow over golden altar in middle. Rows of trees circling out plaza shone with rising sun. Thousands of people, maybe as much as tens of thousands, who really knows, held up candles in the air. Four sisters with funny hats on the statue pedestal cited their issues with current power shift. Two squads of battle sisters secured crowd hailing “bravery” of sisters. Not to mention their pretty garments. Even their senior, though visibly older, still had her charms alright. It helped me realize that local order had more going on than just war training. To me it looked like simple, religious rally.

I was like “whatever, they practice their religion”, shrugged it off and started to beat down on Jason's ass for over exaggerating issue. I don't know what Central Command wanted me to do, but as freshly appointed governor, there wasn't much leverage for me to use. Since we already were at the scene, Kimbly, another from my storm trooper bodyguard squad, asked to stay and listen first hand what sisters had to say.

Servo Skull amplifiers threw mighty words of sister Jessica far into the city. Even though we traveled in unmarked vehicles, citizens begun to recognize uniforms from windows. After 30 minutes or so, a chimera with platoon of



soldiers showed up on the opposite side of square, trying to chase off the gathering. I asked Mastaf about it but he didn't know of any reinforcements. I called Maroo to get some information, but he definitively denied anyone should be present in vicinity. Jason took squad of soldiers to research situation. As soon as he tried to contact this group via radio, stating that governor was present, shooting started in the distance. Renegade sergeant shouted through vox "for the Emperor and glory to the governor", after which mass shooting begun in the crowd. We reacted immediately.

And moved in fast. 3 trucks with 50 guardsmen and One heavy weapons team. I couldn't see well the attacking forces due to crowd but it was big. Not that it mattered. All I had to do was get out and protect most vulnerable points with my shield, allowing my elite forces do the rest. As if. . .

Only my command squad seemed to know how to handle rifles. Fortunately, Sororitas had better aim and managed to mow down attackers away in vivid screams of the Emperor's wrath. It wasn't until last of assailants was dead sisters and crowd finally recognized me. From few thousand people, who now scattered away, few hundreds laid dead. Some of the statues chipped down, one of our truck has been destroyed, twelve men KIA and several sisters wounded. I had to call emergency medical support. Drastic situation change shifted sisters point of view.

Once we cleared situation. their hostility subsided. We could finally start to talk. They had some suspicions about our timely intervention. I'd say it was a good suspicion, but better question was who were the people from other side.

Sister Jessica was the instigator of that gathering and stepped forward to take responsibility for order's actions. Of course sisters voiced their support for her, tried to make excuses for her and stood with her in solidarity, covering with their own bodies. My casual remarks and friendly chat startled their expectation. Nobody expected to governor move out of palace anyway.

After few minutes, Valkyries with support flew in and we finally could clean up the mess. Sister's tone humbled down when they realized I was nothing like they ever dealt with before or how media tried to portray me.

I ordered brigador Mastaf to take over the scene and invited Jessica alongside sister superior to talk to me in one of trucks. Only place where we could talk without shouting over street uproar. Most people didn't know what was actually going on and still blamed us for attack. I actually saw it as a good sign. Resistance meant that people were getting out of the fear and victim mentality.

Sisters were very surprised to hear me saying that. There was still wall of ice between us, though. Calling upon my recent authority, I tried to break the ice by being nice, which worked in some degree, allowing me to extract some information.

For example, fact that canoness Synthia led sisterhood on the planet was taken with a truckload of coal salt. She was put there by inquisitor Mendaz long years before, as she allegedly transformed from old granny to young maiden due to her faith in the Emperor and was declared holy lady of the order, one to lead it into service of the Holy God. At first, it was indeed a sign of her devotion, but many years later it was obvious that devotion turn into desecration. Her leadership was very selfish and concentrated on solidifying her power. She made many enemies inside and outside order. In time, she would be called divine by personas in power in return for a few good words of her own, even in face of



murderers or slave drivers. Turns out that local populace had really enough of this branch of industry. Slavery was seen as most despicable even in ranks of Sororitas and couldn't be justified in any means, denying Emperor His servants, while Synthia always leveraged necessity of all possible means to fight enemies of the Emperor. Well . . . it wasn't much different from core world's point of view.

Within few minutes, Jessica, full of young, burning blood accused me of hypocrisy. Fact, that I allied with Synthia and "traitor" Alastor made me most suspicious even if the greatest betrayers were driven out of palace.

So I asked them what was it with the "traitor" thing about Amelia. It so just happens that major population did not share inner circle's sentiment about bringing her in. It was true she was held up as a hero of old wars, but joining the very rotten organization she once helped to topple instilled dislike for her person in citizens. In following years she would gatekeep public opinion about horrendous exploitation of populace. In most recent years, as she continued to back the regime, people started to call her the traitor. Synthia never addressed those claims, but sisters knew something wasn't right about her.

For order, it meant there is change in power for the same corrupted government. You know, meet the new boss, same as the old boss thing. I started to think just how much too much have I trusted in those people and just how much they weren't telling me. From the very beginning, it was just all too easy. Once again I felt like it all was a trap. Especially with this tithe coming so soon.

With continued conversation I was told Sisterhood has been divided into followers of Synthia and followers of the Emperor. To them, Synthia's unmovable orthodox view was holding back actions of organization against corruption of this world. Ahhhhh, innocence . . . If they only knew half the truth . . . But of course, I wouldn't tell them about secret society.

More importantly, they shared with me names of sisters inside order who would gladly rise up against the misgivings of the power if had the chance. Canoness Janna was military leader of the order in sector, but political power of Synthia made it impossible to move on her own. Most of sisters were convinced that she is truly and divinely gifted and followed her example. Despite her immaculate servitude, if challenged, Cardinal always held Synthia above Janna.

Who as who, but if I could not trust Canoness in service of the Emperor, then there was no one at all. Order of the Laurel Crown was very large, but very well trained due to recent war efforts, which could give me some leverage against Blacklight's massive forces. I could smell and feel war coming very soon. This thing inside me anticipated a death storm.

I asked to set up a meeting with Janna as soon as possible. I would disguise trip to headquarters as inspection. In decision to avoid contact with Synthia for now, it was to be done behind her back. Two girls couldn't believe how easygoing I was. It wouldn't normally be even taken into account by any official, yet I was there, the governor himself who was listening to them and helping their order to clean itself from inside out.

They heard how I helped the insurrectionist to attack the palace and managed to take down half of the security measures all by myself, but weren't sure if there was any truth to that. Since today they have seen my power shield in person, their faith in change reinvigorated.

How eagerly they lit themselves with hope, thinking that they could finally



redeem their order out of unworthy notions of Synthia. I did not care for their wording since for them, everything was heretical in there. Even my own looks. I guess using toilet paper without prayer or canticle was heretical. This conditioning was terrible. And they complained about orthodox . . .

I did not promise them anything yet, but I had to explore any avenue of help I could get. Next topic corresponded to lineage of the ruler class. But before we could dive into it, my bodyguards knocked on the door. Trouble with unsettled citizens led to few fights and ended in one death. Situation had to be addressed by me, immediately. I decided it was best to postpone my meeting with girls and see what it was all about.

In one of the alleys leading out of plaza, group of factory workers were caught in cordon after physical assault on one of the guardsmen who perished. 15 people sitting on the curbs with hands tied . . . and ready for execution. As I went into the drama, sisters watched me from afar. Not only them but most of the crowd did. And my own guardsmen as well.

It was nervous situation indeed. All of them expected that I show firm hand in handling situations like this. After all they killed a man, which by standards of the Imperium is worthy of outright execution. After assessing situation from witnesses, we turned to prosecuted guys. They all had their heads down, afraid to look at me. Some implants made it impossible to see their faces if one could call it like that - already beaten up, bruised and bloodied. They readied themselves for the worst. Squatting down near one that was least fearful, I begun to question him, and suddenly corporal starts to yell that those scum are not to be trusted, that they only lie to save their lives and that they should be executed for what they done. Quite vehement reaction.

"Dis' gon' be gud" I thought to myself and let out deep sigh. If someone is gaudy enough to question a governor, they have to have balls of steel.

Reminded them to be on guard, not on talking, and continued to question the man. He was clearly taking eyes of me to glance at the corporal in nervous gazes. He wasn't too talkative, claiming innocence and begged for mercy. I barely heard his voice due to the beating.

Next thing was to look at the body. And oh boy did guardsmen fire up when I demanded to see it. "Our comrades shouldn't be disturbed. They have a right to peaceful death!" Yeah ... Right. Like it wasn't so obvious something was not right. Reminding them who is the governor here, frowned faces got really upset as they unpacked him from the bag. Lieutenant Ojik had to remind them not to make governor wait. At least sometimes muscle around you knows how to make impression.

Checking out the body was not too hard. I had some forensic experience helping me to search for signs. Bruises and wounds on his head were indeed done by blunt weapons, but only after death - no visible swelling. Looking at his neck noticeable missing dog tags were another red alert - someone already removed it and there was no authorized party to do so. Mob doesn't go this far. No signs of struggle around, so I followed blood. This middle aged man was shot two times. One shot was placed directly beneath carapace armor at spine and other directly in between joints in plates on left side. Nothing like a scorched gaping wound piercing through - Lasgun rounds with extra capacitor power from very close distance. This wasn't rowdy crowd killing but deliberate close quarter



assassination.

As soon as I got up, they knew I was aware of the whole situation. Many of guardsmens' faces turned to shade of pale. I didn't judge just yet, but my bodyguards sure started to, readying weapons for execution order, but wave of my hand lowered those guns. I wanted to hear what the accusing party had to say about this. We separated involved squad to stand under wall.

Quiet. No one talks. All nine silent like graves. Clearly everyone was afraid to talk.

It now depended on me to decipher who did it. And what if all of them were in this together? Was it just a pitiful quarrel, a hateful crime, an accident? I really didn't have time for such trivial things. There was a fucking interplanetary conglomerate with Black Ships inbound, and I was playing detective in some rowdy crowd after citizens rally. Bombastic fantastic.

It did not help to know that almost all of the military was shown my capabilities. Nor the fact that by now, literally everyone was watching. Even some people at home opened windows in living hubs on the street to see what was happening. Event as such as this was unheard of. Governor would move his butt to a rally to help defend rights of people and then undertakes "investigation" to serve justice. Our propaganda team worked overtime to spin it to our advantage . . .

Tried to get some helpful insights from workers under the wall. According to them, they heard shots from the alley after enemies escaped and decided to check it out, maybe help. But when they got down there, man was dead already and remaining guardsmen proceeded to capture civilians and accused them of murder, which followed serious violent beating. It wasn't all that rare on planet, but in upper layers it never was a problem. IG would behave themselves in wealthier parts of city to properly represent governor's influence.

This story was corroborated by other witness accounts, so I ordered release of those people and referred them to medical assistance. They nicely bowed, thanked for my mercy and went off, leaving army suspects still frowning in upset. As sign of prevention I took off all other dangerous gear off them. Pile of guns tossed aside made lots of clunky noises in the alley.

Tall walls of rockcrete facades carried some echo. Surroundings went mute. People stopped chatter, only vehicles in background or ventilators on walls broke silence. Again, caught in spotlight I didn't ask for . . . ehthhhhhhh . . . There even were some "media" reporters trying to break through IG line to take better look. Media . . . how funny is that name anyway. Nice name for controlled opposition propaganda channels. Whatever it served long time ago has already been repurposed for government indoctrination programming.

One by one, they all have been taken to side where I questioned them further. Very few remarks or slip of the tongue, even in face of imminent execution. None said anything concrete. But from where I was standing I could see they were covering someone.

I demanded his dog tags. No one could tell where they were. Obvious lies, but I had to do something, so I called for assistance. Few moments later techpierst came to help me in search for dog tags. He had some kind of tracking device. Dog tags at Mara were marked with a specific chip inserted into them. Every soldier was tagged with the same chip inserted within their bodies. Five minutes later we



found a match in the sewage pipes. Unfortunately dead guardsmen did not have such biochip. Very odd indeed. Techpriest used censer and a canticle to make device cooperate some more . . . Anyway, we were able to track general frequency of that chip in near sewage pipes. Fortunately it was thrown in very shallowly, and easily reached.

Following this name, we could not find it in military database. Easy to surmise such man never existed in Astra Militarum. Never enlisted at least. I did the same with others. Their dog tags were falsified and their biochips missing. Asking about further identification we got yet another round of bollocks. Brigador Mastaf shared his insights about possible infiltration unit from enemy. It was a viable option. Question remained . . . by whom were they sent. As I did not have time, some quick answers were required. Drastic measures called out by drastic times. Those men were taken from palace itself. If they truly were phony spies, that meant a lot of commotion would rise when we got back. And a lot of people might be witch hunted.

Techpriest had no truth serum on him so I had to revert to good old ways of . . . extreme interrogation processing . . . Time has come to look into their souls. Corporal did try not to cooperate, but my psychic grip flopped him to the floor on his knees, very quickly. Knowing what I intended to do, Mastaf and Ojik shuddered after learning what else I was capable of.

Just connecting our thoughts made him flush with primordial fear. Once he felt my intrusion into his spirit, screams begging me to stop echoed through his astral body and street, promising to be a good boy. He broke in tears after I released him.

He confessed that they were contracted Blacklight mercenaries with orders to infiltrate and relay orders to central command, their superior would collect data once per day in set place that changed every day. The one who got killed was scared somebody would exposed it and wanted out. Corporal was the leader of group and responsible for quelling any “misdirection”. Apparently they got there two days after insurrection and were serving BL very well. He told us that there were at least few other groups and some officers not loyal to me, but to Amschel, working against new governance. He begged for mercy, willing to cooperate. I had him stand up from his knees and sent into custody of brigador, to make use of them.

All the commotion aside, it reminded me that Amschel is still somewhere out there, trying to get back to throne. Matters that had passed in last hour shed some new light on the stage I was playing at. Burdens were growing on me from minute to minute. Any other governor would disregard it and let his lackeys do the work. Unfortunately, I don't know how to take it “easy”. Probably my congenital trait. I noticed how my fascination with Ada subsided, making place for focus on the more ... common aspect of my position, starting to take this whole governing seriously. We left scene, leaving remaining operations to sisterhood.

Our way back gave me time to think things through. I decided not to confront Synthia or Amelia with gathered materiel but play for time and hope canoness would be the one to help me. Once we got back, I took Frederick on side and discussed the matter with him. He had no knowledge of these accusations or



how fractured order became. My first command for him was to uncover truth behind those notions and research everything about canoness Janna. My second order, was to contact other insurrectionist cells and setup a meeting – I needed to have those freedom fighters on my side. In meantime, I had to issue some decrees.

Hearing the people and how they communicated with each other, made me realize I haven't lift the punishment for freedom of speech. At least in wide margin of its meaning, it's somehow still there. Had to gather appropriate people and . . . they showed me the legislative process how it was done before . . . which on the spot made me realize how tedious was bureaucracy on Mara. I would just trash the whole system and rebuild it from ground up later, with help of appropriate experts. I decided to just announce in public that establishment of censorship, curfew and wartime special taxation rates on populous are lifted, turning it into taxation of noble houses. Imagine the apocalypse our temporary secretary office experienced with all those calls and complaints in one evening.

This would take some time, but Frederick said he knew how to make it happen legally. Apparently he was thinking about such things long before uprising. He was very uplifted to be put in place where he finally could do some good. A man on a mission. His upped spirit invigorated whole staff with devotion to Imperium. Even to faceless masses.

But. . . after I lost the drive to search for BB, everything went whitewash alongside my motivation of any kind. I was . . . blank. Hard to tell how exactly it felt. Empty, I guess.

I kept on reminiscing and revising everything that happened. Trying to foresee how our enemies would react, to anticipate and take preventing measures, but without inciting civil war. I knew SoS would try to put up a fight and it would cost both sides some serious damage. Population's most basic needs had to come first. For starters, food availability.

I called over Maroo and his . . . entourage he managed to put together, to discuss next few phases of economic relief. I went to bed early leaving matters in his hands. How naive.



— Arrival Day [68_] — Pursuit day [54_] — Day of reign [22_] —

New day brings new perspectives. I woke up just for the sunrise few minutes before 6 hours local. Sitting in the chair and gazing at beautiful, pink, fluffy clouds glimmering in early rays of sun. Mountains surrounding basin held back some of the early mist and residing fog from night. From my windows, there were scarce traces of any buildings in far horizon, hidden in mist. Especially mining depots in the mountains. Rich and fertile forests under mountains gave birth to many fantastical trees that were further engineered to populate rocky plains. Their glowing leaves already reflected some glare of sun. It was one of those days where you are actually happy to look at your world. That day no one bothered me. It seemed as everyone knew what to do. Not knowing what to do with myself, I went downstairs for breakfast.

In the kitchen, arduous argue echoed through dining room when one of the cooks decided to lash out on the boy responsible for meat delivery. Since there was nothing better to do, I checked what was it about. Upon seeing me in the kitchen, everyone suddenly jumped on their feet and pretended to work. Since Nataniel caught up on my early waking hours, serfs had to be at work early as well, but he still begun his shift at 9.

Early this morning, large amount of sausages were to be served at dining table, and in process of preparing, one of them took a sample bite to estimate its readiness. Poor man collapsed in seizure attacks and muscle spasms. He was hospitalized but ultimately his hearth gave out. Techpriest on duty analyzed sample and discovered large concentration of neuro toxins in delivered food. In the process, it was discovered that everything in the kitchen was poisoned. From vegetables to meat. Even those in refrigerator. Someone infiltrated my kitchen to despoil everything. Poor bastards wouldn't know I was resistant to poisons.

A: Not just because I am a perpetual. I developed immunity throughout my life.

A: After 7th Nurgle blight.

A: Aaaaaaa hell no! Can you even imagine how it is to encounter Nurgle demons for first time?. You can tell there is a wound right there, when your flesh just melts off the bone, hahahahaha.

A: I've gone through more shit in this galaxy than all of you here put together.

I was thinking about doing research myself but ultimately scope of greater threats made me set back and leave it to the techpriest on duty. I trusted him much more than guardsmen. In absence of any proper meal, I could eat yesterday's cake.

Gossip spread like wildfire. I wasn't even surprised when no one made a commotion of it. I guess everyone was used to such things, especially in this place, but still, noble residences exchanged their stock just in case.

My problems remained unsolved however. Waiting for contact from Janna put me into limbo. Waiting for anything to happen made me nervous. I am not



used to count on others. Even more so due to what I learned previous day. Amelia was allegedly taking care of people's opinion problem, tryinhg to straighten up and clarify what was going on in the palace for all those decades. It couldn't be easy. Synthia was to take some of the armed forces and clean out remains of the old, corrupted government. She was too eager for my taste, just after displaying such opposition towards me.

From all this waiting, I decided to watch some of the propaganda implemented on vids right then, and holy shit, it was disastrous. Shills from ecclesiarchy, at least those who decided to play along new regime, were pushing redemption upon masses of citizens who got caught in wake of schism. Proselytizing creed of the Emperor's might, they would harangue about importance of unity in this dark hour, and how purity of minds would prevails against wickedness of enemies of mankind and . . et cetera ad nauseam. Everything would be normal, as Imperium intended if not for colorizing and elevating me to status of holy messenger of God.

I was like, "WHAT?! Who even passed this ridiculous sermon into news feed?!"

So I call Frederick to ask him how do I get in touch with people responsible for that absurd drama. As it happened, governor had no capacity to overrule what happened in media, since they were "independent" from power structure, which was nice way of saying it was still controlled by Von Rosette's private sector. I got so worked up, that it became my next objective to take back this broadcasting system. While commissar was on his duty, I had to call "Revered Mother" for assistance. Once again, eager to assist me, gave me a time requirement to gather appropriate forces. For the time being, I had to work with what was immediately available. Few minutes later she would send a message requesting armored company at Mechanicus broadcasting tower laying few miles outside Elkor city boundaries, at evening, 19:00 hours. There was some time left before we had to leave, so I went to nap a bit while sending off my command squad to gather equipment for operation.

It was about 17:00 when Kimbly came to collect me for sortie. Abrupt awakening felt like hit of a truck. I couldn't get myself together for few minutes. Hot tea helped me to wake up. If anything, local brews were astonishingly good in taste and properties. About 17:40 local, Valkyrie transport flew us two miles outside deployment zone. We rendezvous with Synthia in a cave inside surrounding mountains, and boy oh boy, was she unpleasantly surprised to see me there. And so was I.

Up to my surprise, she brought only one seraphim squad, but a quality one. Girls were not only beautiful but geared up in most extravagant armor plates I have seen among Sororitas. Golden flowers etched on armor, with carmine metallic roses braided upon black, velvet capes. And man, did they brush their hair. They looked much more like trendy teens than warriors, like Synthia who did not put emphasis on her looks or presence at all.

Grumpy welter of unending displeasure about my meddling in her affairs has already became a hallmark. I just stood and observed how nervous sisters were about my presence until awkward silence fell over gathering. I turned to Lazarus and told him to share intel we had.

Whatever we had on this site was shallow. We only knew that it was



privately operating broadcast array by Intelcom corporation, a subsidiary of Blicklight. Satellite images were old and did not match actual state of site. Yet, just from looking outside, one could see Skitarii automatons along Blacklight mercenaries pacing surrounding wall. This Propaganda Center was heavily defended. West and south were cut off by rocky hills and marshes. Tall grass with sporadic trees was constantly surveyed by servo drones. Squad on constant patrol on gravel roads around basin. Aside from light defense turrets on top of the wall, tarantula sentries posts guarded outer perimeter. Two gates at two sides were packed with automatons.

Whatever this was, it wasn't your typical comm center or government controlled broadcasting array. It was heavily fortified and manned to the brim. Few seraphs and few guardsmen wouldn't even break through perimeter, not to mention taking over. I specifically didn't want to enter in capacity of governor or any official manner since I wanted to get in quiet, not giving time to erase evidence.

Giving Synthia credit of a doubt, I asked about plans for the assault. Of course she didn't have any and had to make it on top of her mind. She either didn't even try or was actually too dumb to see everything around her, but even her sisters remained unimpressed by this petty attempt. She clearly was a poor commander. Or poor liar.

I have seen such stone faces too many times to know very well what was happening. Commander deliberately kept them in the dark about gist of the operation and couldn't foresee my presence. No attempts of reaching out to her wits bore fruit. Her evasive stance and passive aggressive tone tried to hide uncomfortable unease. Until Ghost, Vindicare Assassin overseeing entrance, spotted someone approaching the grotto. Erratic movement of her pupils reached behind my silhouette, searching for something.

Still, we needed to see what was brewing up. I ordered to scatter around grotto and wait in dark. I told her to hide, upon which she decided to shout her hearth out about not taking my order, masking her anxiety. She continued tantrum until someone entered grotto. At that time she almost froze, not knowing what to do. Her aura overcame with doubt.

For purpose of infiltration I wore standard officer armor so their commander did not recognize me outright. It made him start talking from the very moment he entered, with large detachment of two, full, mercenary squads at his back. He was talking about her being late, and that command was starting to doubt her loyalty. As they got closer, to maybe half the way, he finally realized who was standing beside her. Recognized Kimbly as my personal guard. At this moment, he ordered to kill us. I brought up shield and tried to be nice, make them surrender. As hard as I tried, there was no chance. Deafening rage of bolters echoed inside cave. Sororitas didn't wait for order. Soon, my men followed. There were some guys, who managed to detach and run away. Most of them were picked off by Ghost, but one managed to run away. We could expect reinforcements any minute now. In meantime, I directed attention to sister superior and everyone rallied around me.

Synthia sat down like helpless child. She didn't even have a weapon. Sisters didn't know what to do, but time for explanation was over due. Sister Sera launched frantic litany of questions which remained unanswered. In turn, my soldiers asked me to resolve this situation, but I didn't know how to handle it



myself. First of all, my capacity of governor didn't include oversight over sisters of battle.

Alarm sirens howled from compound. Another pickle. As I tried to think of any action, sisters would not stop nagging Synthia more and more. Fortunately, Ghost came back from recon. Defense forces headed towards us - whatever Skitarii had been guarding it, in assistance of BL's mercs, were en route, tagging along heavy weapon platforms. Inbound in three minutes. Everyone waited for my orders, including sisters, who handed me temporary oversight. Four of five seraphims would stay in cave alongside twenty guardsmen I brought, while my command squad and sister superior would go outside. I had Synthia cuffed and taken into custody for time being, until situation clarified. Understandably, Sororitas weren't thrilled but complied, however they would question validity of my decision about defending against attacking force, instead of disengaging and calling reinforcements.

Honestly, these few cohorts were not my concern. It was Synthia that occupied my mind. What else she set me up for? How many times she undermined my orders or sabotaged our efforts, et cetera. Sera tried to make me consider retreat. In situation like this keeping calm is the only way out. Mastaf took his men outside and sought cover over boulders on slope, while sisters were to sit in cave, as surprise reinforcements. I walked out of cave, down to plain and readied myself to use governor's credentials to stop this mess.

Security forces opened fire few hundred meters before I could even shout to them. Nobody responded to my radio calls. After first shots, I understood my plan didn't work and had to do it the old way, readying powers.

Most powerful cannon they had would be neutron laser on Dunecrawler. Lascannons from heavy weapons would miss more than hit. Whoever was teaching them accuracy was not on the job during training. Every time I fought alongside Skitarii in war, they had less than decent accuracy. I don't know if it was due to bad parts or sloppy enginseering.

Whoever operated Onager didn't know jack about first tenets of warfare. He broke off the line and charged at me with difference of almost 200 meters. And of course, didn't bother to check who he even is charging, because random, armored psyker shielding off constant barrage of whole company's fire is just the target you want to rush. As it came close I simply ripped off its legs from main bulk, effectively immobilizing it face down the ground. Idiots everywhere.

BL's Chimeras tried to circle me, while rest just run forward, shooting somewhere between clouds in the process. At that time I was thinking only about getting rid of attackers, but looking at the situation I thought to myself, why not take it to the end. After all I was at the circus already.

Took my PDA and called out command squad to provide fire, while I hunted chimeras, relying on rocks as projectiles. After first one was immobilized, second one just drove away. Or at least it looked like it. In next moment, it returned with another volley of shots in attempt to discourage me from walking any closer to trapped mercs. Flagrant mistake. You do not want to get close to such entity without any information about it. If anything, you just kite it and avoid close contact. It proved fatal for them. 50 was right in zone to grab it firmly enough to destroy its tracks. And rip it in half. Remaining forces started to realize who I was and fell back. I let them flee behind hill. Mostly because I didn't want to damage



my healing process.

Seeing how security forces backed down, Sera came out of cover to stand beside me. Rest of my soldiers joined me in the field alongside sisters. Synthia would only look at the ground, refusing to talk. Seraphim squad gave up on extracting any information. Guardsmen were pumped full of adrenaline.

As I ordered to contact base via radio and made them to stand down, we searched for survivors. Techpriest from Dunecrawler was easygoing and did not need any convincing to cooperate. Especially if it was me asking politely. It didn't help much though. Together with Mastaf, seraphs interrogated captives as best it was possible in the field. This place was just broadcasting array compound, such small fries did not know at all what was happening. Enginseer told us Blacklight sent reinforcements this morning to secure facility. From what Ghost surveyed and prisoners told, we had pretty much solid knowledge about facility. Antenna array connected to satellite web around planet and orbital main communication center at Starport Alpha.

Damage from invasion day attack on my hands was not yet fully healed. Cuts, hemorrhage or broken bones and melted flesh healed in just few days, but this wasn't bodily harm anymore - my auric field was still reorganizing even if my hands seemed to heal up. If I went berserk again, I'd just damage it further and would have yet another few weeks long recovery period.

Instead of storming base, I called Maroo to order reinforcements, reporting only basic situation. We had to wait around one and half hour while enemy reorganized. In addition I had high priority prisoner alongside twelve captives. Not exactly setup for an assault. In occurring situation, decision was made to get back to cave. I took Ghost to side and instructed to continue to observe facility with possible infiltration route to help in planning the attack.

To be honest, I found this assault on facility vividly awkward. Maybe due to spur of circumstances, but I just prepared to spark whole war with BL myself. Even if I was "legitimate" power. Most of all, this gnawing feeling that I miss out on something kept on returning.

In meantime, Mastaf and Ojik tried to contact facility in order to resolve situation, but there was no response. Static filled radio. Whenever Ghost tried coming closer, wall batteries shelled him with fire.

Maybe ten minutes later, we heard rumble somewhere in the north. Few second later first volley of light round pieces landed on a mile tall comm spire. We tried to get in shelter but there was no other cover than giant boulders. Hundred of high explosive rounds started to damage whole valley, indiscriminately killing everyone. Even if plentiful, they scattered across plane. Destruction was superficial at best, accuracy all over the place. Fire for effect. It was obvious to me, that this place was marked for deletion as soon as I knew about it. As bombardment begun, rescue teams tried to evacuate VIP targets from compound. Everybody else were on their own. In mayhem that followed, survivors run in all directions. Staying in cave became too dangerous, forcing us to move up the slope of mountain.

Maybe five minutes later, orbital weaponry locked on. Macrocanons decimated area in five shots. Ground shook like vibration table. All I could do was to gather my unit behind rocky walls and shield us from debris. Light caliber shells left few craters. Small artillery stopped as well. I immediately ordered



Mastaf to contact High Command and send battle fleet towards whatever was shooting at us. As abrupt it begun, as abrupt it stopped.

Whole base and its environs reduced to rubble. Forest in the valley decimated. One of big shells hit mountain on the opposite side and sent torrent of big rocks into air. Dust in the air obscured light for half an hour. We had one casualty.

Synthia decided to talk all of a sudden and answered few of my questions. Whatever the reason, it almost made her burst into tears. Turned out, that she wasn't compelled to help me from the get go. She remained at palace as Ervin's insider. She relayed my order to Blacklight's commander at Reina Citadel, who consulted this with von Rosette and came up with a plan to hold me back from investigation, playing for time.

Squad I was supposed to sent for help was to be found dead, investigation undertaken by their insiders while they cleared evidence within facility. Attack on compound made her reconsider whose side she upheld, because inside, there were few precious people to her. It clearly left her deteriorated. Broken. She wouldn't suspect that I would personally take any steps against conglomerate. Told us that there were some very bad things going on in the basement of this facility, and confessed to be one of reasons of its existence. Broadcasting Array was just a front.

My issue wasn't the actual operation inside, but what did it have to be to nearly break spirit of Sororitas. So, my next question was about what was so important for her in this facility. Unluckily for me, it was limit of answerable questions for today, but in a way her body language said it for her. Tears of loss filled her eyes as she dropped her head. Now that made seraphims uneasy. Their role model, Revered Mother, elder sister, the canoness Synthia broke down in front of them after such colorful confession. And you didn't need to be a farseer to know how all their world was torn down in ruin. It looked almost like PTSD. Tough as they pose to be, they are still human. Disorientation filled their minds.

Fortunately my sidekicks kept cool head while morale of rest crumbled down. We had at least half an hour more waiting before any help came. Last thing I needed is to loose control over my own men. All we could do was to help survivors while watching behind our backs. I headed down with techpriest, while Mastaf took prisoners and put them to work. There was no complaining.

Some transports headed back after the massacre to dig into what was left. Few minutes before, it was giant fortress. Now, it was crater of ruins. Once again simple folk became astonished how "conveniently" I appeared after major disaster to help. I have to admit it really was suspicious if you looked at it from such perspective.

Seeing me on the scene, remaining officers from Blacklight pledged loyalty to my office. Our Techpriest used some toys to search for living matter, which led us to underground bunker entrance. I have suspected that this place was actually a black site. And I was about to find it out.

Blast doors were too damaged to move on their own, which forced me to use my powers. This strained me enough to call it quits. We had to do it usual, military way, by remote melta charges. Fortunately our sergeant Lazarus that was just the man we needed. After all, he was my honor guard not without reason. As far as Militarum was concerned, guy was genius in close combat quarters. So much even



Mastaf praised his skills.

I called Ghost back to squad and we entered. With Kimbly as our point man we moved steadily forward, fighting with whatever automated defenses there were still working. One level lower, we met sturdy gate closing off entrance to main parts. We used plasma cutter to peel hole big enough to get through.

Befriended techpriest could not get us access to forward circuits due to lack of protocols. Ceiling was chipping off in few places, but with scans performed by servo skulls we were sure it was in safe condition.

Base was quite cramped with scientific equipment. Neural networks for mindwipe, torture chambers for souls splitting and creation of sub personalities, ocular serenes for programming, chemical tables for drugs, medical tables for implanting, gestate chambers for genetic treatments. . . This was VERY well equipped facility. And fairly large. It had slave work production lines, holding chambers, experimental research section, bio forge laboratory, Automaton assembly line, Cyborg reconstruction wing and everything . . . based on heretek. Main part of the base was actually system of delta-T generators suppressing natural frequency of the planet. With every broadcast they performed, additional sublime frequencies would disrupt natural magnetic field of human auric field on planet and even some in space. Underground facility had multiple levels. Easy to estimate it had the same area as ground complex. And it was burrowed deep. Sloped elevator, we had to take to get to first level, would move for about a minute before someone cut power. Lights on the boarding station below were hard to notice. Good thing we had techpriest with us, who installed temporary battery pack into lift's energy system. It was barely enough to open gate and fire emergnecy lights for few seconds.

Unfortunately, there was welcoming party at the bottom station. They did not fire but were ready to. Fortunately, Kimbly was as good at trash talking as he was in a fight. Mastaf took this chance to seize command of the outpost. It went better than expected. When those guys recognized governor's honor guard, they just outright surrendered. Fame gets door opened better than HE bombs.

Since I was wearing helmet and no one recognized me, I would lag behind, searching around for anything interesting while they brought personnel and facility under control. Bomb shelter and most of housing vaults were built near entrance for ease of transportation. In there, we found most of personnel, both BL and civilians. No Mechanicus though. Imagine the bitterness and butthurt of our techpriest when he saw that those filthy fleshlings dared to meddle with Omissiah divinity. They made really good precautions against Mechanicus's status quo. And past it.

There was no fighting. No arguing. We didn't even need to capture anyone. Commander of the base, at least underground part, would comply under condition that they would be treated as regular POW. Nothing too much to handle for my guys. While they sorted out ranks and exchanged duties, my little self roamed free in corridors of this wretched place. Search wasn't long. It took one glance behind glass wall into one of the indoctrination rooms.

Sizable and well lit with dozens of weird chair machines lined up under walls. Three of them currently occupied by young boys. Steel caps on top of their heads connected by branches of wires to wall mounted machines behind chairs. Strapped by leather belts and zapped with electric shocks howled quietly while



examinator servitor checked progress of program. It didn't matter that I was tired. Anger infused me with power. This joint was about to blow like everything above ground. With my with sight, I could gauge state of their souls, but . . . there was nothing more to see. Their spirit matrix tampered enough to create splits and primed for parasite infestation creating leech vessel for warp entities. I knew they would not be able to get back to society in such zombie state. All I could offer them . . . was mercy. With one more discharge of energy blast decimating whole laboratory, chamber begun to collapse. Upon hearing devastation, my men sprinted to the scene to find it all destroyed. Psionic blast demolished few surrounding walls, took out some of columns and partially collapsed entire wing.

Scientists would associate facts remarkably quick and reckon that I was actually the new governor. And for that matter, the only, official, psychic on the planet. This incident made them understand that I did not like what they were doing in that place. In moments of feral fear, some attempted to flee, but were stopped at the entrance by soldiers. Being in no mental state to talk to anyone, I just explored further. Lazarus took head scientist of the division for a stroll with me. They kept silent until asked about things.

For most part, facility became vacant. Since creation of new government, it was supposed to be cleared out and moved to some other place, but I trashed all their plans. Only few divisions were still in use. One of them was part where new obedient servants would emerge for the elites to buy. Perfect slaves, split into different personalities, each programmed for different service. Those . . . programs would not know about other splits and would remain docile until brought forth by special subliminal commands. Self- destruction mechanism put in place ensured that victim would rather end its own existence then to reveal any secrets. Perfect plan. Till this point.

Hideous as it was by nature, treating all those gathered children as commodity, there were some of the participants that roused greater concerns. I have seen such mess thousands of times before and it did not get to me anymore. That is how this damn galaxy operates in the end. Call me jaded.

On Second level however, things changed. Main corridor was unlike any architecture I have seen. Instead of bulky and heavy walls, sleek and bright interior built in organic and clean way, spelled aerie calm atmosphere. That place was NOT designed by Imperium. It was merry and bright. Everything lit as in full sun, but no light source at all. Scientist explained it was all magnetically induced illumination. Walls were not made of rockrete or ceramic tiles but smooth and matte metallic surface. Its rounded corners had no right angles. Perfect anti-static, dielectric surface. I could feel my aura being disturbed. Any average person would loose soul presence due to subdued astral signature. I kinda know such technology from Necron contraptions.

Once we traveled deep enough into facility, eerie silence has been cut by closely unidentified noises coming from behind one of the doors. As I approached them, headman slouched in unease. Hiding his eyes didn't work. Clenching lips, crossing arms, standing aside, frowning eyebrows, surveying floor etc, were very obvious. I knew that it contained something really . . . uncomfortable.

There was no going back. I couldn't find the control panel however and asked him for a clue. He wouldn't respond. Had to remind him his duties, after which he came close to put his hand on door. Palm lock suggested that he was working specifically here. He told me most of the facility was working with



individual thought patterns serving as locking mechanisms for machinery. I asked if they used AI . . . he didn't say much, but it seemed they really did have similar construct overseeing whole base.

Inside corridor, leading further down, sound was much more pronounced, coming from doors at the end. We went through checkpoint rousing red light on the boarding gate. At this time it did not matter anymore. I wouldn't wait any longer. Those sounds weren't botched singing but groans of pain. Of multiple people. I run to the doors as fast as I could shoving them aside not even waiting for opening.

Large chamber with all round walls behind glass wall in perfectly sterile environment. Seven large medical tables with surgery machines of bloodied leather coverings stood against walls separated into isles by tempered, matte glass partitions. Whole set was built one level below observation deck. On three of them, naked women were tightly strapped by belts and steel cuffs. All of them had wired diodes attached to bodies on all parts of the body. One of them had skin from her abdomen removed with wires from that weird machine directly stuck into her meat. Thick cables almost wholly obstructed her body.

Another one had wires piked under her nails and into . . . opening, being constantly electrified. Her face was covered with bag and gagged. Blood trails soaked through cloth on her.

Third one was laying almost dead. Technically, her body was put to coma while awareness has been put into state of semi subconsciousness, as she would undergo eye and ear induced indoctrination by oculus headset, in tightly secured enclosure.

All Ambient sound reminded of ever changing frequency levels, subliminal messaging, messing with brain weave patterns. Something like on black ship, just . . . bit less intrusive.

My fatigue did not matter. Trashing through observation deck wasn't that hard at all. After I broke through, jumped down and ordered to bring me that guy from corridor. Taking out all those wires took priority. Ripped of damned partitions of the ground since they pissed me even more. Coming close, I could finally recognize who they were. One of them even came to my palace few days ago accompanying Synthia . . .

All three were Adepta Sororitas. After my rage cooled off, I'd look at monitor to see programming video of sexual doll, periodically intermittent by flickering frames of binary coding. Normal state of awareness would not be able to process those frames, but in that coma, subliminal programming was hundred times more effective.

One of my worries was about how much Synthia herself was programmed in this facility, brainwashed, and memory wiped after. Maybe not in that particular, but in such type of facility. This notion of new youth and age regression sounded far too good to be true from start. Especially when someone as wretched as Von Rosette was included.

Everything I could do was cosmetic help. Actual bringing them back into front awareness had to be done properly. Scientist knew what he had to do. After bringing him to the scene, he would start to wake them up immediately. It was a lengthy process nonetheless. And even if they came back, they would do so in a sleep. It served purpose of not traumatizing front personality. I couldn't imagine



how sisterhood would ever agree to such treatment of their cadre. Much less believable they would do it willingly.

At this time . . . we, it . . . seemed a bit off, but they looked peculiarly similar. Almost like real twins, or triplets. Similar in body frame and facial structure. All this doll training brought back memories of Ada back to me. How much could that person be trashed by her creator in most disgusting way. How far he would push forward with such horrific means to achieve her awakening? I could only image what else he prepared in other places.

Situation was sort of clarified by arriving reinforcements and presence of Frederick. I ordered arriving forces to focus on helping securing underground facility, setting up special ring, red tape it all over and keep knowledge of what we found under strict, cosmic 6 level clearance.

Instead of helping rescue teams, I'd go to field command setup to use radio. Wasting not a moment, and not waiting anymore for contact from Janna, dispatcher connected me directly to the st Dominica's monastery. However surprising it was for sisterhood to hear me calling out name of Canoness, I demanded to call her back from current assignment and await visit. Girls clearly did not like to be told what to do. Especially from men. Especially if my office didn't have authority over their order. This time she did not have much of a choice. I explained her gravity of the situation without going into juicy details and told her to contact High Command to receive situational report and pass it to Canoness.

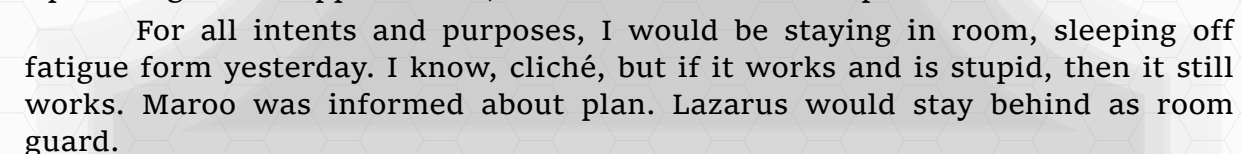
Too much content of this madness was outside my area of influence. I just imagined what inquisition would do if in three weeks they came to witness how grotesque and morbid was cult influence on the planet. Witch hunters bewitched.

I needed to take situation in my own two hands. All of my associates could be double agents and not even know it. Fuck knows who you really can trust. In my mind, I was alone. Again. Everyone else could be clone with multiple splits not even aware of it. If they got their hands on Sisters of Battle, there was no one out of their reach. And no one was safe from it. I would start probe everyone's astral bodies just to make sure they are humans.

With situation majorly contained, we took Valkyrie back to palace. Looking back, I think that commissar knew what was going on, but not uttered a word. Maybe signs of paranoia were just too obvious to ignore or my behavior changed drastically from day to day, but many of my palace personnel noticed change as we got back. He tried to make case for informing sororitas about situation, but I ordered him to keep it undisclosed under Umbra 3 clearance level. I called over everyone who knew of the situation, feeling need to remind them of keeping this under wraps, making them swear silence until further notice.



Somewhere there, another propaganda array was fully functional. This





So we gathered everyone and set off to visit Janna. It was four 4 flight in machine not designed for hauling personnel for 14 000 miles. If you can't imagine, know that it's steel seats aren't a bit comfortable. We spent whole journey gazing at nervous Sororitas keeping themselves from choking Synthia with murderous gazes.

Located at edges of northern ocean, where giant lush forest met edge cliffs of Northern Expanse, St Dominica's monastery, named after first heroine Dominica, was a piece of art itself. Since Synthia took over spiritual leadership of the order on planet and neighboring systems, main campus had seen drastic makeover. Usually frugal and purposeful, buildings that served as tools, not homes, were now decorated with golden statues of heroines, situated atop of columns of white marble. Gloomy gray walls of rockcrete redone with real granite blocks. Four sparkling spires at four corners of outer walls would be visible from tens of kilometers away. Large cathedral campus expanded into giant military complex. Every other monastery was almost pauper in comparison to space marine outposts, but this was matching a might of a chapter's home world stronghold. Both in scope and in quality. Even from above, at first glance, amount of heavy equipment or even a Baneblade standing in front of main gate, couldn't express vibrant and rowdy nature of busy people down below.

It wasn't serene at all. More like emporium. At the center of it all, a mile tall cathedral would signify holy land seen even from star ports. Aeroport located atop cliff was big enough to anchor two corvette class ships. Almost whole order gathered in one base. It was huge. Counting serfs that helped to run the place, it had almost 25 000 people. Hundreds of rhino transports on eastern polygon looked like grains of sand in desert.

I was astonished by quality. Monastery is usually a secular castle. No ugly and murky half decomposing stone huts that I was used to see in such places. In stark contrast to living space for population of this planet, monastery looked like home for upper class. Even if it was training ground for sisters of battle, everything was masterfully built, like aristocracy mansions. Large, spacious training halls and living rooms inside tall, slender, crystalline spires. Sisters weren't wearing skinsuits, spandex, rags or cheap jumpsuits. Each had almost nobility grade clothes, as fancy as local military discipline allowed. Some even wore bloomy dresses. Amount of jewelry and accessories among sisters was unheard of. Even with the first few minutes after we landed, this place reminded a fairyland. Every attire crafted specially for owner, with personal touches and decors. Even serfs looked well dressed and well maintained.

Although there was only white or black hair colors allowed, ladies brushed them in multitude of fashions. I never imagined that such place could exist in Imperium at all. Unlike any other Sororitas training grounds, discipline did not restrict their tastes. Sisters actually had free time in the day to socialize after training regiment was over.

We arrived at the exact 17 hours. I was amazed how sparkly and colorful were streets of this domain. In leisure time, sisters were allowed informal clothing. Streets decorated with stands and chapel kiosks. From time to time one could see how musicians gathered crowds in plazas, accompanying choirs. Lanterns and street lights connected by strings of colorful lights on both sides. Shrines to imperial saints were present on almost every street. Big, bricked domes would house statues and sculptures of mysterious nuns and priests in service to



their God Emperor. Sisters on duty patrolled streets with their serfs and made sure candles were lit on every altar. Nowhere could I notice any servitor. Everyone working there was a 100% fleshy being. Only sisters had occasional temple implants.

We were directed to secondary landing platforms, next to main administration spire. Before we landed, Frederick reminded everyone about appropriate conduct within monastery.

First officer who greeted us, was mistress Leonida. And man, was I blown away even if we already met before. That girl was a beauty. I didn't care if it was genetic manipulation or whatever. Unlike any women present, her "informal" clothes consisted of tight, ornamental dress. And Damn did it look better than royal mantles. She either went through age regression or had blessed genes, cause despite being head taller then her sisters, she really had beautiful, unblemished face like . . . Ada. That was a real doll. And as hot were looks, so was the temper. We didn't have a chance to discover this side yet.

I didn't even say a word as she loaded us with litany of misconducts we committed by just "visiting" there. Problems started to mount as Synthia showed herself in bay. Stripped of armor, back in black jumpsuit, cuffed and escorted by remaining seraphim, questions piled up about her state. Especially about why she looked like half dead torturee. Beside seven ladies in welcoming party, two guards on duty readied their weapons. Frederick took over as our talking man.

It got messy enough for seraphims to intervene. They referred to Synthia by her commander status, informing rest of sisters that governor had came to pay visit to the Canoness Janna, about her accusations. After they lowered weapons, we were asked to follow celestians.

Lengthy walk allowed me to look around monastery. Some might say, audaciously. Everyone present looked at me like I just made a mortal sin. And no one yet knew that this blue hair boy was the actual governor of the planet. I suppose girls weren't used to presence of men at all. Man . . . they really lived in their own bubble. Probably my looks must have been like meeting an alien in first place. Yeah, and for them meeting alien is not exciting . . .

But their structures were wonderful indeed. There was not even one room or corridor that wasn't decorated in some manner. Either by paintings, flowers, sculptures, stucco, furniture or all at once. This wasn't murder training barracks. Those were nobility grade housing buildings. Even ceilings had some nice stucco accent added to them. Statues in halls, curtain flags on walls, and garlands stretching between walls.

Walking through marvelous bridge of st Jordan's sure brought memories back from golden palace. Maybe not so great or pompous in its form, but it had at least something in common. Great halls of main cathedral assembly is where main schola dorms housed acolytes. Due to large amount of trainees, lessons were going on almost all day schedule. It trained not only battle sisters but other branches as well. Main building complex was a castle in it's own right. Large defense platforms, although unmanned at the time, would prove against any invader as sturdy as palace's defensive lines with their orbital cannons.

Main gate of inner wall was opened all the time. Bridge and main walkway under arcade spires was full of tall sculptures of heroines. No gold lacing but sandy granite was polished almost to mirror perfection. Side balcony path served



as meeting spots for students.

This was unbelievable for me. In fact, I have seen pleasure planets where sumptuous life equaled in comparison. All of it was like a dream state. Every girl we passed, would befit title of beauty. That was the greatest concentration of feminine Sororitas I ever have seen. Not that other sisters are bad at looks or behave like raging bulls, but . . . you seen yourself how order took care of their sisters.

This place just let them blossom into different . . . direction. You could easily court any of them without reservations. With varying results as a matter of fact. Most of those girls were tougher than governor's personal guard . . .

After long climb to the upper seclorum, we had to wait in prepping room until Canoness Superior was ready to meet us. In meantime, I had an occasion to feast my eyes upon presence of celestians. That wasn't your typical dull plate armor. Janna's elite sisters wore armor of shiny gold. It was as astonishing as Custodes' auranite. I haven't seen such marvelous master crafted gear outside noble houses. Laced with silver trimmings and sapphire petals. Their sword built to perfection adored with gold reliefs of victorious warmaidens. Capes of blood red carmine braided with holy sigil upon silver tapestry of Terra. Pauldron cloth of red velvet and gold flowers. Girls looked like wonderful masterpiece. An art itself. And I thought that Amschel's servant girls were resource sink . . .

The one standing near window had black side skirts with woven silver tree around it. Vividly heavy, not only in unique shape of every part, but in demeanor as well. Two of them would follow discipline by the book, standing tall and proud on side of the doors, one sat with us at the table to keep close company while remaining three just took a break at the sofa under window. Even if on duty, they still behaved like dames at court. And so they looked the part. Even their puffy hair.

We sat in silence for maybe a few seconds, until Leo started to tell us how to behave, what to do what not to do and so on. She even reminded that to celestians. Despite porcelain face, she had to be a matriarch. I don't know what got into me but I started to be very talkative. Especially when it came down to being lectured by Leo. Frederick had that unease written all over his face, "please, I beg you, stop talking". Still, none of them knew that I was governor. It's not like I hid away transmission of our victorious proclamation few days earlier. Or media coverage. Girls were living in their own bubble, not caring that power structure had changed. And of course presence of their cuffed senior back in the Valkyrie added to tension. Mostly between seraphs and celestians. Both were curiously suspicious of each other. I don't know if that was pure woman thing or job related. Anyway, Leo was very vociferous about my loose tongue while at the same time trying to know why Synthia was held prisoner. She had very good training at pushing herself onto others. Quite literally, as she came close enough to smell her sweet perfumes and almost rubbing her body on me. If that was intimidation attempt, it certainly reached opposite result.

Seraphim squad wouldn't respond to her calling, Frederick expressed need to keep this knowledge for Canoness herself, and . . . I didn't care, which pissed her off the most. After like ten minutes, Janna opened door, very angry at this noise.



Janna . . . Well, Janna was, well, still is, your by the book type of sister, who held up to every rumor, myth or imagination about Canoness. With one exception. She actually is looking the part. In theory, sororitas are branch of ecclesiarchy, yet due to unique circumstances of this planet, they acted almost independent of it. There was no prioress of the order so position of Canoness superior had almost full control, until some time ago, when Synthia became pointed "spiritual leader". Unless cardinal ordered something.

You know . . . maybe in scope of all that transpired it would be a very bad and unpopular take on it, but . . . I think it did sisterhood more good than harm if we look at it in broader perspective. Not that I want to defend her, her . . . guilt or bullshit she dragged through her sister, but. . . . In recent times of relative peace, order of hardy warriors changed course for order of fancy warriors. Since twenty years, Order of Laurel Crown has put emphasis not only on battle effectiveness, sacrificing some of discipline hours for beauty preservation, with blessings from Inquisitor Mendaz. Synthia had vision of growing her sisters to be worthy of being called daughters of the Emperor, both in strength as in beauty aspect. Since then, training and practices included lessons of being a fair maiden. And it did so with flying colors.

Yet situation was very grim at the moment. Leader of organization was about to be informed just what did it cost and how was her fellow-sister-in-command criminally entangled in a whole bunch of shady businesses. Not to say, heretical. Frederick even brought testimony of the survivor girls from laboratory. It wasn't much, but sure it did matter a lot.

After muting our quarrel in guest room, we had all been "invited" into the chantry. She wasn't too hung up on the pleasantries or talking at all. Being almost at the end of the tail, all I could see was her shape. And lush white hair. And her . . . well . . .

Until we finally arrived at her residential chambers, she forbade us to talk at all.

First thing she asked upon closing door was about Synthia whereabouts, who was still in the Valkyrie transport. Dragging her sorry feet through citadel was not an option due to public exposure.

Being slightly more relaxed, we could sit down at the round table in the center of the room, but sisters would stand guard against the walls. Seraphim squad was taken to separate room and interrogated in quick mode. I expected a long run for tonight but everything was proceeding smoothly. It lasted maybe five minutes. One could see that she wasn't thrilled by news of what happened. Upon taking seat in front of us and giving sign orders to sisters, who left us alone, in heavy voice wanted to know what happened that I demanded urgent meeting, AS IF WHAT HAPPENED IN LAST FEW WEEKS WAS NOT ENOUGH! I swear . . .

She tilted me already with her first demand phrase and I felt that it was going nowhere from the get go. When commissar tried to speak, she'd just cut him out with a move of a hand, allowing only me to speak out. Awkward silence turned into even more awkward silence when I tried to engage in small talk. First about how nice it was to be hosted in her monastery, then about how nice for her to meet me, you know, official and serious as one could, like I used to talk to other "important personnel" when need surfaced.

A brief moment gave me some time to properly look at her. Until then, I did



not notice that this armor was not Sororitas plates at all. Despite collar, it had nice cleavage, cloth lace gloves, plain red cape, big red lips . . . big, green eyes underlined with thick smudge all over, tight uniform, high heel stilettos and a darn shiny, silver sapphire circlet on forehead . Sitting cross legged, arms rested on sides of her throne with her chin up all the time. NOW THAT was awkward. I had serious doubts whether she tried to intimidate or seduce me. Janna was this . . . jewel, how I would describe her, of natural, plentiful beauty who didn't need much to present herself, but . . . it was impressive. Perhaps if this whole thing . . or let's not precede facts.

I just attempted to resume conversation, trying my best not to look at gorgeous . . . I related what happened in the cave more or less in detail after which her eyes closed for a moment. Story about what I found in the bunker made her jump of the chair and wonder around with crossed hands. She asked who else knew everything that happened. Since I did not know whom did Fred share information with, I told her that only seraphim and my command squad. And personell in the bunker, of course.

Apparently seraphims did not know whole truth since they did not tell story exactly as I did, omitting some of the more troubling facts, like sisters used in hideous experiments or Synthia's involvement in it. Janna knew how much previous governor was entangled in it, alongside her "counterpart", yet she would not suspect inquisitor appointed sister to be of such wretched heretic. I brought to her attention that Synthia could be a victim of those programs alongside Amelia Alastor. Then, I spent about ten minutes trying to explain to her how such mind control or split personalities worked. She had to admit and cope with situation. Greatest concerns were about how many of such victims actually roamed premises of Monastery. Data slates we had provided, had some of the names and origin of people who were brought to facility. Few seconds into looking at them, she threw it into ground, shattering device. Clearly upset, sat in her chair, then turned to me. Looking at me. I have seen many times, when all those clergy people were ripped out of their bubble and left alone in the dark, pulling the rug from under their belief systems. Cognitive dissonance. They were soooooooo entrenched in their belief that everything was dandy. But not her.

She recognized few names from gathered material. One of those names was very close to her. In fact tat person was waiting just outside narthex. Damn right it got me curious, but sad at the same time. We didn't have time to properly investigate all of the procedures they undergone there, nor did records contained which part of personnel was taken. There was no way of telling if they were perpetrators or experiment objects. It did not console her. As canoness, she tried her best to mask feelings, very well if you asked me. That poker face would fool anyone, but I felt her energetic field going awry. No matter how good actor you might be, you cannot fool your own soul.

Janna would gaze upon me from time to time, trying to decipher what lied beneath my blue, glowing eyes. While she was thinking, I took a look around her chambers. Most precarious place, unlike commander's chamber I imagined in monastery. East wall with big, clear windows under which stood altar of stone. Few golden relics atop its short, wide plinth with small columns arranged into arch with large chandeliers behind each one. Central pedestal had big book already opened.

Stone floor was covered in part by red carpet. West side wall stairs lead to



upper floor at which multiple paintings hang inside blank window frames. That room could easily contain a hundred people but there was only one table with twelve chairs, two wooden pews in narthex and sofa at balcony. No books whatsoever, save for the holy rites on pedestal. Ever present candle would fill most of the surroundings. On table, on stands, scones, ground . . . in volume. Every candle had mount of its own. There was also training weapon rack and dummies near northern windows. What was not typical for Sororitas, was the large amount of pot plants and flowers. Where we sat, pretty smell of laurel ivy and rosebuds would gently stir my nose. I could close my eyes and feel like in garden. West and south wall had no windows so room was largely shadowed. I imagined how perfectly it had to contrast with candles in the sunset. She probably noticed my imagination running wild.

As she just walked front and back, I caught myself staring at her. It was quite maladroit. Every time I would visit canoness of any other order, it would be shouting session and perennial litany of sermon about servitude to the Emperor. This was . . . quite nice change .

Good few minutes passed before she asked me what did I plan to do with Synthia. I told her that it was not my place to judge her, but I needed her knowledge to battle this unholy alliance of Von Rosette. That name was strange to her. Apparently Janna always thought that Amschel was the mastermind. I told her about roundabout things connecting Synthia to Society of Sovereign. It caught her attention. Told her about stacks of books and how "order" provided few sister dialogus to help. It became apparent that she knew nothing about it, which enraged her inside.

In return, she confessed that she knew just how in the dark has Synthia left her in regards to how she fared outside her supervision. It was even to be expected, as those operations were of clandestine nature, but inquisition tied her hands. Inquisitor Mendaz had clearly set their positions apart and made none responsible to each other. Even when she herself brought damning evidence of privately used influence, it was ignored. He threw case out of the window, right in her presence. No investigation, always screening her with blessings of the Emperor. I told her how inquisitor Mendaz was bought with gold. A lot of gold. That made her furious outside. Once again, she paced around room in anger. Moment passes and she outright asks me what's in it for me. I might have been the actual power behind government now, but . . . she saw me as tentative . . . person. She didn't say it but she clearly did not take me for a real governor. I guess it was inbred instinct to mistrust a psyker.

A: A hell No. Imagine how would I explain to her my origins. She would not call me just a heretic, but a most abhorrent, delusional dumbass.

A: No one bothered me about it. Everybody thought I wasn't fully human, yes. My psychic abilities were considered unnatural. But nobody said a word. Perhaps they felt endangered or just didn't have an opinion.

A: Maybe. But most of people kinda liked me. Some were very fond of how I looked like. Somewhat pleasing to the eye.

A: Sisters never showed if they cared or not. To them it was important I was following good grace of God Emperor.



I answered in the same manner. Hoarding wealth was not my objective. I expanded conversation to tell her about Reitziger and von Rosette. Truth was, that my drive to find BB had passed. Only thing remaining was to obliterate this conglomerate and be on my merry way. That included mysterious SIN. Even though I did not know their locations.

She was impressed with how open and upfront I was. As everyone in this line of work, she had been used to swindlers and double agents. Even asked about poisoning in the kitchen. I just shrugged it off and told her that "I dunno". Angry she was at my carefree attitude. Angry because I didn't care for such "important matters" which could get me killed without any effort.

For me, there was whole myriad of more important things. Assassination was my last problem on "to care list". My plan was to discover all black sites, unraveling this whole plot and learning how was it even possible to happen in the first place. Even more nervous made her fact, that my gaze never flinched while looking at each other. In general, no one likes that, taking it as a sign of threat. . . I don't. Especially when she has eyes of a beauty. Seriously.

Even as she got angrier, I still liked her, which made her even more angry. No idea why she was so antagonizing. Perhaps my expectations were placed in wrong place. Appearance might have changed, but mindset laid untouched. Being unable to intimidate me, which looked like her standard tactic, caused her to feel like she was losing grip on situation.

No, I wouldn't tell her to calm down in her own monastery. That could be very unhealthy. I was quite sure, that I saw my sidekicks shaking butts as she leaned against table shouting her discontent. If anything, I was smiling at her.

She had to remind me how I butchered through three lines of defenses and killing off bulk of previous government. At the end of which, she realized how same could happen in there, but I was just sitting, being a good boy.

After all attempts of intimidation failed, she finally ended hostilities and sat back on the throne, which allowed us to talk about our plans. She was . . . skeptic about our cooperation, but decided to play along with me, until my first display of weakness. Janna declared to search for members of this society and would leave up to me annihilation of underground organizations. Last thing to discuss was fate of Synthia. As canoness, she had the authority to pass judgment on her. If I dared to it myself, it would bring much of unwanted attention to my person. One sensible resolution would be to give her back to the order and interrogate her inside Monastery, which was at that time a sound plan. I certainly did not want to have her blood on my hands. Cementing this last resolution, she got up and took us for a walk outside. We spent less time in there than I would suspect. It was already 20:00 hours local when we came to conclusion. Golden sun still hovered above sea level but wasn't long before it started to sink. Lights were off, but all the candles lit already.

Officer quarters were a nice place with ever present gardens all around. We might have been above city but even there sisters took nice care of surroundings. Even some of novice girls helped in keeping floor clear. Rules did not permit abhuman creatures like servitor to be present at all.

At such hour, most of residents were free off duty. Only guards stood around in armor, while supervisor sisters wore informal clothes. Some of those



did not differ much from plate armors. Overbearing black, red and silver was vividly visible against rosy and gray stone walls. Instead of polished sandstone tiles, marble walkways with gold accented trims covered main walkways of the floor. Garden areas were build of gray granite. In contrast to lively green of plants, sculptures would find themselves illuminated at night. Even in early hour as that, it would be lit already. I liked it so much more than excess of palace. Capital spire was created just to crack at seams due to level of attachments. Monastery had it much better arranged and exposed. Most of the decorations weren't meticulously or crazily crafted down to pikometer. Healthy balance between overall feeling and amount of work put into it. In the middle of the garden was built altar with few pews. Lit like fireworks. With hundreds of little candles.

Most of lightning came from pyranite candles. It's wax substance made from Germantia Bee wax, embedded with Vein Willow bark wick, one of the bio luminescent tree species. It is very sought after product in the sector. One candle would burn whole day straight with warm, golden flame. And didn't stink.

Corridors inside had standard lamp luminescence, but outside areas had mainly candles to light up surroundings. Even if it was not yet night, amount of ambient light all those candles provided was bright as floodlight.

In the garden we walked through to west wing, thousands of candles shone in golden flames. Literally. I could read a book anywhere in there. Pack chandelier every few steps. Not just for light, but for show as well. Every silver candle holder had six mounts in diameter and six in vertical arch.

And it was not just a singular stand, but whole columns sometimes twice my size, lit up like promethium firestorm. Seeing how beautiful it looked, I wished to stay to see it at night. No chance though. Sisters would not tolerate our presence any minute longer.

To avoid any rumors, Valkyrie had to change location to upper landing pad, where Synthia would be uncuffed, properly clothed and escorted to her quarters. Janna promised to relate to Frederick all intel she extracts, but even as we waited for our bird to arrive, we could spot how she clenched teeth.

In moment celestians would show up with proper equipment, she gave order to land. I expected formal and quiet exchange, but couldn't be more wrong. After hatch opened, she almost leaped to Synthia, grabbing her by throat and pinning against bay wall. Janna had a lot of grudges to settle with her sister. Being taller, it was obvious who is the predator here. She despised all what Synthia did. In momentary lash of hate, she promised to teach how they dealt with heretics. In spur of the moment I intervened, trying to convince canoness not to resort to the same methods, reminding her how Synthia could be not in full control of herself. I really couldn't stand just like that knowing she would skin her alive while burning at stake or worse. Long years of animosity made her really angry.

Releasing her from iron grip, she'd almost run out as fast as she jumped in. I could see twinkle of tear in her eye. As usual, nothing is ever so straightforward and simple. I know how deep can sisters bond. Or guardsmen. Or marines. Humans are still humans. And betrayal . . . never comes from the enemy.

Seeing how none of the celestians even tried to help Synthia, I took it upon myself to deliver her baggage and help her stand up under pretense of hasting it up. Metal case contained black skinsuit and red collar, nothing more than a symbol of imprisonment for her. I wondered how would Sororitas treat her. It



wasn't yet official, else she would be delivered the most nightmarish punishment possible for human imagination. After Synthia walked out, we left immediately. No one talked on way back.

When we were back at the palace, it was dark already. Stars in plenty, against giant, neon nebula. This night had conjugation of two small moons. Those were maybe quarter the size of what Luna is, but still they looked as bright. I slept three hours on the way, and air filled with brisk energy of evening rain kept me awake. Instead of bedroom I headed to the garden and lit myself few candles to sit and look at them. They had something captivating in them. Reminded me of Monastery gardens but most of all, of sisters. Made me think how I would react to Edmund if I saw him. Just what would I do when I finally found out all the secrets behind madness of this world. Lengthy and deep considerations made me forget about whole world. Just for one moment, I would be myself in my own world... beyond good and evil... In this cold world alone. Taking my time. Just looking at the stars, smelling cold night. Closing my eyes I could hear only sounds of breeze waving leafs of trees. When gale blew out the candles, I decided it was time to go to bed. Calm and unassuming. Without worrying about things I cannot change.



— Arrival Day [70_] — Pursuit day [56_] — Day of reign [24_] —

Early morning was freezing. Window that didn't lock properly last night let through some of the cool. It felt like winter whenever I opened duvet. Warm bed persuaded me to stay slightly longer, but I just rolled from side to side, unable to sleep again. My thoughts were in disarray, unable to set at ease. Cold or not, I had to get up. By the time I finished taking a shower, room temperature rose enough for comfortable living.

This time I got up really quickly, it wasn't even six in the morning. Not knowing what to do with myself, I explored room for all its nooks. Floor was big enough to accommodate multiple families. There was enough free space between sleeping part, living part and wardrobe part to play sports.

On the west wall, before hoisting column that connected to wall, creating nice corner full of various stucco and ornament sculptures, wardrobes of various sizes and bookcases of various books filled it through halfway. Even wheel ladder stood in the corner ready to reach upper segments of books. Most of them were very old. Some leather covered, other steel covered, some about novels, some about science. But most of all, just romance stories. I suspected that ladies had to have a lot of free time to read all of them. Thinking about ladies, opening the wardrobes let out nice perfume aroma. Seven giant doors for seven big girls. Built into the wall, every door was not only big in size but space behind them. Every wardrobe was a utility room of itself.

I could build in each a separate workshop. Each with multiple compartments that neatly composed storage and dressing. Light fixtures on top lit up vividly, like searchlight in the night. Everything was even more visible than in sunlight. Dressing segment remained separated from rest of space by tall, heavy, solid, dark wood folding screens, equipped in shelves as chairs. Ladies corner has been covered with fluffy, red carpet trimmed around by gold brink. Barricade ended near column, leaving opening entrance. This area was the only one, which did not get cleaned up, for whatever reasons. There was a lot of clothes laying outside stalls. Most of it consisted of underwear and lingerie. There was some coats and furs as well. White ball dress, crimson evening gown, two piece suits and of course shoes. Of all kinds. From slippers up to armored, gold, high boots. All abandoned in hurry. What impressed me the most were sizes of those pieces. Some of those bra could serve as helmet for sure. Most crafted of gold thread . . .

I opened each of the door gently and slowly, imagining that someone could be there. One could imagine. What I found were clothes, clothes and clothes. Something tickled me to step deeper into one of them and look around. In my amazement, poorly hidden, under trousers, laid a photo album. Curious in an instant. Within its blank spaces I would find only two photos. Both of them had all seven girls smiling to whoever made them.

First one had them all energetic, smiling, full of life, excited and frivolous. Hugging and goofing around garden patio. All wearing wavy summer clothes.

The other, was this awkward, enforced smile of despair. Done much more recently, in expensive and fancy dame dresses, on rooftop gardens. Sitting politely with arms tucked on their laps. Ginger girl, on the most left, wasn't even looking up to photographer.



Just by looking at those pictures I couldn't believe that those women were bioroids without any soul. Especially in first picture. Authentic, real girls who were genuinely happy to live. There existed no programmed smile like that, and no matter wiring they would have, no soulless being would smile and hug with others like that. In embrace and laughter. If anything, it was the later picture that showed them becoming soulless.

It made me think, how valid were the rumors of those bioroids at all. In the end, only one like that I met was Ada. And great transformation she undergone in mere two days. Looking back at what happened under propaganda center, I wouldn't believe in empty clone container theory anymore. Nonetheless, I put both of pictures back as in a feeling its owner might find it. Sometimes . . . I wished they did.

With nothing more to visit in this strange compartment, I went to look around window lounge. With so many tables and couches, it was possible to have a wedding party in there. On the enclosure wall of the pillar, a front office table with some bar stands would cramp in corner, beneath line of paintings. All of them murky and grim. Such contrast to the light wood, bright colors of the furniture. Centerpiece of the area stood not in the view, but on the ceiling. Grand show of angels in heavenly realm circling painted portal into golden kingdom of Terra. All of them cut from white marble, with gold coverings added at the edges of wings. Just looking at high ceiling filled with so many sculpture characters could get one dizzy. I sat for a while after which I climbed stairs to the semi floor.

Newel of the giant pillar, that I did not explore earlier, led to mezzanine surrounding west and south walls. On the vista point near northern windows, balustrade made sure I don't fall down five meters down. Stroking my finger along wooden railings, I could feel just how smooth and perfect were these made. Dark brown wood of Vein Willow glossed polished, in pink morning sun with it's veins responding to call of the colors. Dimly purple luminescence of old wood still held up its charm. White marble floor plaited with gold arabesques beneath shiny polish, looked like glowing beam in early sun. Stone tiles had no visible cuts or borders, seemingly created out of one piece, like poured water.

Giant eastern windows, directed at Elkor, outstretched imagination of viewer with shadow play of the spires in front of them. Quiet and cozy bench, alongside dining table, sofas, chairs, pool table, drink bar, and wide swing helped to relax my strained mind. Only gentle choir recording level below broke through silence. Even as I leaned myself on the rails, warm rays of morning sun grazed my cool face. Gold frames of tall glass connected on the wall with floral paintings. Cornices filled up with corbels divided vault ceiling from pilaster walls. Strokes of my fringe broke off the combing to rest easy against incoming light. I put my ponytail on shoulder just to see how metallic blue shimmered in morning sun. That deep glacier blue of my hair is what I like about them the most.

I looked at them for a moment and turned my head left, towards door hidden between two drapes. Those would be invisible from ground level. Dark green, velvet trimmed with gold fringe covered most of the mezzanine's width. Along the wall, beside its plain, gray, glossy set of ancient armor pieces decorated space in front of arrases, steely door would sparkle from holes in drew of the curtains.

Doors wouldn't open by proximity. I had to search for console under drapes, but it was offline. It got me curious. I went to techpriest in the power bay, to



borrow programmer. It would help to check for any malfunctions in circuitry. I also borrowed some basic tools for the job. Abrax did ask if I needed help, but repairing console wasn't anything hard. At least when you have as much experience as me. He wasn't sure if I voiced my request right.

Unfortunately, even if I took console apart, it turned out to be working just fine. Only thing that came into my mind was lack of power. Searching for wires in that room wasn't really an option so I went to engineering again, to get their help this time. I needed to check out every possible cable connecting that door. It was much harder than one could expect. That door was not shown on any blueprint. Whatever was inside, remained out of charts. That wasn't a good sign. Secret rooms outside techpriest supervision are only trouble. I called Kaifas to ask if he knew anything about it, but he denied any awareness of such place.

By consulting cogitator panels, one of enginseers found greater load of voltage than specified by documentation. In fact, he found few of them. There was only one in the circuit of governor's chambers so it became easy to hunt down. While curiosity took them over completely, I headed for breakfast and left the matter in their hands.

After finished eating, I took a cup of tea with me and checked with techpriests. They discovered hidden shaft on landing pad near mid levels that connected to secret room in the clergy area. Since it was ecclesiarchy sanctum, they would not disturb prayers. It was up to me to go there. Of course it wasn't so easy, so I had to gather command squad, Frederick and get some more official clothes to approach in official way. Governing billions is easy. Dealing with cults is not.

As you might surmise, they didn't know anything about it. Priestess Tela was spitting venom at our sacrilegious attempts. Nobody treated this seriously. Seriously. It did not matter that I WAS by all means and purposes, on paper and in fact, a ruler of the planet. I guess I just don't have that something . . . Or maybe it was my approach to their indoctrination process. I mean the imperial truth . . .

Inside secular chambers of church, you were expected to keep quiet and focused on prayers. Thousands of candles lighted up corridors and sacral arts pouring out of every patch of walls. Me, being just a necessary evil in that place, wondered around while Frederick and techpriests searched for the vacant space. Process which caused loud screams fill mute chambers. One of them launched Tela into hysterical screams of paranoia, which even I could not ignore. In the Altar room, priestess would yell and spit on her chin in the process, when they "asked" about access to wall behind reredos. According to seismic data, it connected to sacristy by narrow niche tunnel. It was a solid lead, but sisters and priestess would not let us pass the altar. In commotion that erupted, guards and servants gathered to look at the circus.

After few minutes of reasoning, Frederick run out of ideas and turned to me to resolve the situation. I ordered to dismantle the wall and uncover the pit regardless of her whining. You can imagine rage of priestess when guards cuffed her. She was taken to sanctuary and guarded carefully while servitors prepared equipment to open wall. Techpriests did at least honor the relics and together with sisters moved them safely out of harms way. Whatever was not bolted on altar had to be removed. When all that remained was stone and wood, plasmic blades would open path. You can imagine the opposition it aroused within ranks of clergy.



Everything went smooth until foul smell reached our noses. Abrax, through his inhaling apparatus, could with 100% accuracy state it was decomposing human flesh. The accompanying techpriest LIX-MU had immediately begun quarantine procedures by securing perimeter. Even I was instructed to get back. We knew they meant business. Unlike completely machine augmented, we could be contaminated by malefic organic bacteria. Quarter after, guardsmen brought appropriate equipment and we could proceed, but only skeleton crew remained. It took few additional minutes to operate plasma cutters and make an entrance. All who remained have been equipped with shoulder flood light, hand light and headlamp supplied with battery pack. I was the first one to enter and search area, with Abrax behind me. Thanks to my eyes, I did not have to carry those cumbersome gadgets, but carapace breastplate did not fit well on expensive shirt. Frederick wouldn't shut up until I complied.

Behind a 2 feet thick stone wall, we realized that the altar room has been actually halved in length. The canopy for relics was supposed to be in the center of the chamber, but large portion was cut off and compartmentalized. Hidden part was fully finished and decorated, but had no ground installations. At the opposite wall, frame opening was covered with thick, heavy curtain. While techpriests set up air filtering machine I took Frederick and we proceeded to see what laid behind cloth, but he spotted another hidden door on the left side of chamber. It was neatly covered by sculptures. No one had idea where did they lead but suspicions allowed me to authorize search for any disturbances. We sent boys to find the missing door and its mechanism, so we could finally go behind hanging. It did not surprise us that door of the same design as in bedroom were built into wall. These however, were slightly skew at the top, which I suspected was the cause of leak. It was plenty obvious what laid behind them. Another dreadful thought about what I might find upstairs gave me nausea.

I asked techpriest to open it. I wouldn't risk using my abilities. After prayer to Ommissiah and canticle of the machine spirit, Abrax proceeded to connect to command console, but in futility, caused by lack of power. Due to proximity of power switch connected to door, servitors were able to restore energy in matter of few minutes. It was around 10 hours when we walked in.

In big, stone chamber stood three stone beds upon which rot three somewhat decomposed bodies. Somewhat preserved due to low temperature, but already in process of liquification. All three were feminine, nude and gagged. Arms and legs of victims were chained to stone beds. Torture tools blackened from unwashed blood, laying in shallow stone font under tall column. Multiple wooden thrones surrounded ritual site, three of them had some kind of mantles thrown down on them. Not much more to say. It was a witch rite. Right under everyone's noses.

All those years of "just doing what they were told" culminated in discovery that broke them down. Averting their to what has happened to others, made them bear heavy loss. I told Frederick that situation needs to be kept under wraps. Unfortunately, one of the nuns committed suicide few minutes after. Tela tried as well, but she did not shot herself in the head. Some sisters couldn't believe such heresy happened right under their guard.

More and more whispers of inquisition have circulated around. Many believed that I was acolyte who came to investigate. Some of the rumors told that I was heretic itself, since I could find so many pieces of it. I even heard gossip



about me being one of the Amschel's bastard children coming to overthrow his father. Fantasies of the folk never cease to amaze me.

LIX-MU performed inquiry about how were those rooms even built while Abrax gathered what was left of the bodies.

It wasn't even dinner time when a lot of noble houses demanded explanation of what transpired within palace due to the buzz it caused. I had to meet with Maroo and his advisors to contain information leak until further notice. He vowed to take care of media blackout, but we had to put statement for the people. I delegated authority over it to him for next four days so he could do it his own way.

Taking advantage of the occasion of that meeting, he mentioned that slavery wasn't being dismantled at all. Even if governor has issued official statement, production facilities contracted workers under disastrous conditions, which plummeted working efficiency. 40% of population was removed from their workplace. Corporations fought me through their only means of doing so – screwing population. Even if it was just three weeks, despite promises, overall citizen lost any hope of prosperity, and if “we didn't focus on it”, which pretty much meant, “We are fucking screwed”, Mara's sociological web would further collapse, if that was even possible at this stage. Situation was so bad, all privately owned corporations outside Elkor District have seen 73 % closure. Only few remaining were those behemoths directly under von Rosette's ownership, which quickly engaged in taking over underpriced enterprises, further collapsing our production possibilities.

Setting up those kind of industries wasn't my strong suit. I had vague idea how Custodes operated back in the days, but my industry managing abilities were not polished to say the least. Most of all, dealing with secret society, which wished me out of existence, was quite frankly impossible at that stage. Only way out was to brute force it, which was exactly what my enemy wanted. It would allow him to declare independence of tyrannical structure and use his private army to take back what he had, while feeding public opinion with BS. Even if I had some of the barons at “my” side, to use such term, although very strong politically, they had little grip on the economy. Process of legitimate law was already out of window. None of noble houses actually knew how to operate in such environment, when all they have done is following orders of one man. And most of all- it would be too lengthy. Such thing is precisely what Emperor tried to avoid. Society of two left handed, entitled parasites feeding upon hard work of others, denying whole humankind their needed resources. Now, it gone so far, that even aristocracy tasted their methods of concentrated capital, being left penniless by the top predator.

I postponed meeting and returned to bedroom to think, while his advisors brainstormed ideas and plans. Dealing with such decisions was one of many reasons why I never pushed to the top. Nepotism and dumbasses. My nemesis. Even though I travel galaxy far and wide to help it stay afloat, power struggle is my least favored sport. Yet, in absence of any sensible person to do it, I . . . was all that's left to make it work. Sure, I could let Amelia take over already, however she was a pawn and learnt to obey orders, not to think for herself. One thing I promised to myself, was to get out when I finally assimilated Von Rosette into pavement. Until then, I tried my best to help with this mess.

Nearly falling asleep on my bed while thinking about possible resolutions,



one very important fact struck me in half awareness state. Where is Amelia Alastor. That's right, since few days, there was not even a recorded message nor passed secret note through her handyman. Got up, turned on the noosphere and called Frederick. Something clicked in him as I asked about it. He seemed to perfectly understand why I touched this subject and became very interested in the matter. Before hanging up, he said that it will become his priority mission now. Honest to goodness, I was bit worried about it. What if she betrayed us or was dead already?

After hour of unproductive wandering, time has come to rejoin Maroo in office room. His seven "advisors", or rather governor's "advisors", sapped a tea while waiting for my return. As I predicted, brainstorm wasn't getting anything at all. NONE of those idiots haven't got a clue about how work is actually done. If there is something worse than tyrannid swarm, its the incompetent dumbasses in the Administratum. They thought being noble exempts them from doing honest work. After fifteen minutes it was obvious why colonel cannot do a thing. He himself was soldier, not a tycoon, and had no help to solve this problem. I, on the other hand had little patience left.

I needed to call commissar once more. Fortunately, he seemed to be one of a few competent persons in there. I wasn't going to complain, but asked how to legally change current "advisors". He told me to just rid if them and search for new ones. I heard chuckle in his voice when he reminded me I was the governor.

Of course, it WAS that easy! But finding competent people wasn't.

I sat there, imagining how will I get rid of them. Yeah . . . impoverished nobles . . . For a moment I thought to throw them out of window. It was self inflicted misery wound, about once again not so important matters. I just saw with eyes of my mind how it will look like when I get out of toilet and fire them all. It had to wait at least until evening. In meantime, Maroo and me would do all the heavy lifting. As evening came closer and closer, I became more and more antagonized with their carelessness, yet straw that broke camels back appeared in form of disregard for life of the people they were supposed to rule over. People who made their fortunes in the first place. Damn pathology of "rich and powerful" is the leading cause of Imperium's demise. Without a second thought I implied with fiery words that they go . . . smooch themselves.

I even called Ojik to escort them out of palace. Almost shell shocked, seven fancy wigs, indignantly demanded that my decision be revoked because they are so big and important that leaderless Imperium would not survive without their glorious visions any day longer. Until gun was placed against their heads for insulting governor. At least they had enough dignity to leave by own means, before I broke their legs in anger. Calming down took me some time. I stayed in room watching as palace guards walked them out, to their luxury Avs on lower pad.

On the other hand, atmosphere in the council chambers thinned out. Most of people had a laugh, looking how mighty nobles were fired due to incompetence. Like a mini celebration, some even gathered for drinks in staff room. . . . Me, not so much. I felt like running away once again. Ever present doubts about validity of my actions weighted me down, even without adding this ... sacrificing mess to equation. Mastaf and Maroo tried to cheer me up, but to no avail. Instead I appointed brigador as one of new advisors. Made call to Kaifas and told him about what happened. He gladly accepted invitation. For lack of better ideas, I took a



walk from palace to park through hall of heroes. Alone. I needed to clear my mind. I felt like a loss, not a boss.

One of the isles drew my attention. Behind its window grew field of Glog. That kind of three which had almost granite hard wood yet very brittle, big, oval leaves. Bark almost glittering with iron gloss, jagged and overlapping with young layers, creating illusion of stone mold on top. Moment of rest brought to me idea of incorporating Sororitas into official organization chart of the Administratum. Took out my PDA and connected to Janna's private quarters. No response. In a few second after, a dispatcher called from mission control to check out who tried to invade Canoness. Big surprise to hear me, even though I called in through the same girl two days ago. If you ask me, she didn't actually register who she was talking to. By all means it only made conversation easier to get through. Unfortunately, lady Janna was currently on offense against pirates hacking down supply routes from Rotuna system. Person left in acting duty was palatine Leonida and sister Synthia.

That was very disturbing news. What happened since 40 hours that made head of order pardon her foul transgressions, I could not imagine. In a second, whole searching for replacement fell into oblivion. Synthia back in the graces was much more interesting, up to a point that I went to central command myself, trying to contact Sororitas fleet.

That wasn't easy. They had much stricter communication protocols and I could not get approval without prior consultation with Sororitas Command, even as governor. Ten minutes later my ferocious fascination with situation at monastery vanished into thin air, leaving me empty and purposeless. Feeling of nothingness filled me up. So obvious was my state of mind, that even command officers proposed to call over Magos. After I politely refused, new information came through about skirmishes with Orks in Dolan's Gate system, 562 light years away, which was forward navy base of operations and defensive station. Apparently our fleets were taken by surprise, having a hard time dealing with bands and sent message for reinforcement. This would be in gesture of High Command and admiralty, which were not at palace premises but in hive city, spaceport district. I always knew that managing an empire is multi factor chain of disasters. This was just case study situation. On top of struggling secret sect cults, almost rebelling nobility, failing tithe, civil war, greenskins had to show up right after pirates begun to plunder most utilized trade routes. And one of Sororitas leaders was in dead center of heretic program.

Imperium, sweet Imperium . . .

With this setup, I could infer that there was a driving force behind all of those pieces. It was painfully obvious, that marauders were clear setup by Von Rosette or SIN. Orks could be a coincidence but I just assumed it was their doings as well. It perfectly played into art of war; "create distraction at left to attack at right". Too bad for them I learnt how to see through such petty tactics long time ago. My problem was not the actual invasion. I-I mean it was serious, but something cast shadow on my mind, preventing me from straight thinking. Even if I was looking at data and graphs, my brain couldn't process what I was seeing. Time was short, therefore I called emergency meeting at High Command very same evening. Instead of walking back to governor's chambers, I took elevator for once. Everyone was both excited and worried about this red alert. Frederick asked me what was this about, and he received full briefing about what happened at Central Command. There was no surprise in his



eyes. In fact, he anticipated such moves to be used sooner. It meant that we were doing something right after all. He finally had a chance to budge this stiff mess power structure. Mastaf, being senior in the ranks and in the officer staff, told me beforehand how poorly optimized are efforts of fleet command, so that we wouldn't go in unprepared. An hour later, my Albatross flew us to the meeting in company of five more Valkyries, packed to the roof with storm troopers.

While in flight, we had a chance to discuss our vector of approach. Frederick knew some of those people from days of shady deals and nepotism. Some of them sat in the command just because they had noble families. As to who could be useful, he knew only of one man he posted there himself. Brigador however, knew few admirals himself and could vouch for three of them to be loyal to the Imperium, which became our starting point. He suggested that I follow what happened to the advisors. The plan was very straightforward. I was to close myself with admiralty in the commanding room, while rest of the band performed swipec for any damning evidence.

Flying above city was a sight to behold. Far above, spires of foundries and melting pots of unnamed human masses down below, giant metropolis had its lights already on, despite sun being only partially in decline. After ten minutes of spacing out on couch, aimlessly gazing at web of housing hubs surrounding city's massive transition lines, we touched down on the main landing strip at High Command. Not much to say about it. It's your typical over the top bunker stronghold which houses the most important members of navy. Extravagant details and ornaments were present only in main and in officers compartments. Rest of the facility have been built for functionality. Almost bland.

Welcome committee consisted of rear admiral Strain and his commanding officers in company of dozens of soldiers. As everyone else on this planet, were surprised to see me in person, not actually believing that I was the governor. They tried to poke fun of this unusual situation, not phased with my silence at all. Ground transport took us all to the commanding bunker through underground tunnel. Built on solid bedrock, command center had deep underground chambers for all kinds of purposes. There was even segment for "private businesses". If soldiers needed anything more than a rifle, it was girls. My radar instantly spotted lazy and dishonest cadre of shills running this facility, and I didn't know where to start purging it. Even their auric fields have been soaked with malignant energies to the point of loosing light within their heart nexi.

Those guys just had something in them, that made me loathe whole bunch. Such chancer personalities who couldn't actually care less for my presence and went on with their hideous behavior. There was one man who knew how to remain professional. Rest were present, as Olsmo said, just because someone handed over them position. I couldn't understand whether they were just playing games with me, or someone paid them to be this stupid. One look at their men told me more about how lackluster they were in any military aspect. Bunch of rich kids playing war for fun, not giving a damn about slightest consequences. My first urges were to shovel them into a bucket and flush down the drain. Not only were they drunk and high, behaving like hobos, slurring and stinking like bottle of perfumes poured on trash bin, but couldn't even properly address me as governor, thinking we were on same level.

I couldn't do it outright though. To make it legitimate, we needed evidence. And to get it, I needed to buy us time. Under excuse of inspection, we invited top



cadre to main command while commissar performed sweep. Throughout duration of this meeting, my guard was on high alert. I couldn't really tell if they were luring me into a trap of were just this plain dumb. Those idiots did not even know names or ranks of their own officers in the room! I perfectly know how the aristocracy conducts themselves, without a care in the world, however this wasn't just incompetence, but outright madness it . . . they weren't even behaving like puffy and . . . sassy or high and mighty . . . just plain rabble. Bossing over everyone without a slight consequence or thought. Those people as I learned later, were wasted due to lifetime abuse of drugs. Not even brain implants helped loss of brain cells.

They disrespected even commissar Huges who sat at the back of the committee counter, with petty jokes. His grand moronity, Alexander Grav vel Herman tried to tell him how to conduct himself in front of "big shots". Each and every one of admirals was convinced, that they were in charge of the whole world because they commanded fleets. After twenty minutes of this circus I couldn't contain myself anymore.

In anger, I got up from my seat and yelled at them to finally shut up. Couldn't withstand how scurrilous lowlifes they were. In few sentences, I leveled their egos to the ground, vibrantly expressing their lack of any brain cells. And few threats. A moment of panic had them called for guards and started to clumsily back off towards exit which . . . I used my powers to shut tight. This time I called guards and ordered to keep idiots under watch, positively surprised by level of cooperation and total lack of hesitation from voidsmen. My anger subsided and politely, they were asked to sit down again to answer some questions, but all I received back was outrage mixed with flowery insults. Stupid as bag of hammer, couldn't even listen to survival instinct. Once again, commissar asked nicely to sit down, but after they threw tantrum, one of them even spit on his clothes. Without smallest wink in his eyes, Huges shot guy down, terrorizing rest of mighty command.

Messy, but effective. In control no more, high commanders were both disoriented and scared shitless. Even I was in shock about such abrupt execution. Commissar, despite being quiescent, seemed to have everything in control, looking like he knew what he was doing. Ordered some people in room to bring chains. Once proud nobleman have been chained to their thrones. After everything was prepared, commissar holstered pistol, guarding lot by standing in front, proudly presenting his chest up front with hands at the back. I was free to ask questions.

Even after explaining undergoing investigation, they seemed not to connect to reality. Charges of flagrant misprision and death sentence did not impress them at all, just antagonizing more. I turned to my subliminal powers. Tried to influence their minds to give in. Gave them a chance to get out of there alive if they confessed collaboration with Blacklight mutinous forces.

They did not, but in resulting conversation I got a hold on to some nice intel. Mainly about power structures of noble families and their ties to de Estana. After series of disasters, something was falling in place. Up till now, I was but convinced that Von Rosette had ultimate power over the industry and authority. Those were suggestions and observations of how his SoS really operated alongside mercenaries.

As luck would have it. In recent years, BL was divided as to how to properly



use that power, due to shares of the company being held by three major families: Von Rosette, Himalac and de Estana. In litany of humility, they plead to name all personnel connected to it, in return for mercy. One of them, Alejandro, cousin of Marcus de Estana, promised to get his attention and influence for my cause. Rest of clowns pledged their service without me even asking it. Maybe I am too soft at heart after all, but looking at them I couldn't bring myself to execution. In moment of silence, struggling with my thoughts back and forth, nothing sensible came to my mind, so I ordered to put them under arrest until end of investigation.

Since I used quite a force to shut gate, doors wouldn't open via console. . . wonder why, and had to open myself. It certainly impressed everyone in the room. After all was said and done, commissar came to me asking what were further orders. Instead of giving out one I asked him what should be done in his opinion. In full confidence, he laid out multiple procedures and actions needed to tidy up this mess. Before he went on with his work I asked him for his full name, Percival Huges.

I did not stop there, sitting down on one of the empty admiral throne chair, I questioned him about what happened at base in days of my infamous attack on palace. He followed with explanation how high command operated in reality, not on paper. Composed and solid, as duty demands of him, he didn't flinch to uncover any mistreatment of abuse of power, even those in which he himself participated, as sworn in to Imperial authorities. There were secret meetings with power brokers as noble families were deep in trouble after Von Rosette's rise to the top. Retaining hold on legitimate military structures was the only way to ensure they would not be exterminated. What I was wondering about, is why commissars know so much about everything that's going on. That was a moment when he finally smiled. It appeared that alongside Frederick Olsmo, he was one the few surviving kids from Akeno black site and served together in war. Thus, both of them had similar characters and capabilities when clandestine operations were considered, although his genetic enhancement was not as far reaching.

Just as we were finishing our chat, my command squad appeared from the depths of the dark corridor. First thing Fred did was to shout after boy on call to prepare a tea for the governor. He really was considerate . . .

Undeniable, wide, banana smiles grew upon their faces as they closed distance. Firm grip of hand shake followed by words of displeasure about how sloppy job they did on each side. Meeting full of confidence and fervor. Even though Frederick would be taller, Huges was more bulky. To the point of smaller space marine. Both of them visibly hailed from the same training facility . . .

I haven't seen him that happy before. Very glad to see each other. It was very uncomfortable feeling to break the mood, but serious business waited at hand. Had to remind them about Ork war bands and that command needed a replacement right here, right now. Before sending them to work, I placed upon them both responsibility for scouting new cadre. They saluted and went off. My squaddies sat beside me, explaining what they found in private offices. It wasn't anything to charge them with treason, but enough to charge them with serving private interest instead of Imoerium's. Just logs, messages, even letters about what some of the donors expected in return. An easy and clean job for a judge. Not even noble immunity status could help them. To be honest, I expected to shed light on this murky waters of conspiracy, but no luck there. We put them under arrest to await proper process.



You know hot it is with nobility. Few minutes after we let them have a call, suddenly my PDA lighted with multitude of calls from noble houses, nicely asking to make a deal in exchange of keeping this . . . "incident" out of records. I promised them a compromise and ordered to call Maroo in order to make a deal.

With material behind us, I asked if there was any point in me being there anymore. Mastaf was adamant in trying to have me stay as head of military forces. Since hundred years, they haven't had such strong leadership and needed to capitalize on it, show people that they have someone worthy to follow. I agreed and sat back in chair. With nothing better to do, it was a good opportunity to ask him about his connections to that place. He had little to none, as he was in land corps, not in navy, but he met with few admirals on previous occasions on grand balls at the palace and had some connections to soldiers who worked inside high command. With opportunity arising, he tried to assure me everyone was on the same side, shaking off years of excess abuse. It did not convince me at all. But due to lack of anything else to do, I just kept on talking with them.

In time, one of captains came in, being sent by commissars. Offered his assistance and readiness to serve. I invited him towards one of command chair, after which, brigador begun barrage of questions about his history, ship, duty, experience and bloodline. That last topic was always the most important. It dictated whether you could or could not climb up ranks. As it happened, captain Russel Kwintet hailed from slums of city Muraka. Conscripted 42 years before from fertile lands of great Blend Fields of Rotuna II. Being of common descent, he had no hopes of ever reaching it high. Until I arrived.

While we talked about his experience and detachments, I ordered parchments, papers, ink and seal. It looked like he was veteran captain of many years. He commanded one of cruisers, currently in repair, Radiant Spear for over 26 years and have been there at time of Amschel's offensive against outer planets. He claimed to have won of dozens of battles and even had some ground command experience. Despite his accomplishment he was still held back and frowned upon, by commanders who didn't like his integrity and care for people. Due to his animosity, his ship was manned by the most unruly soldiers and was given only tedious work. He did not know about how incompetent and how . . . eeehhhhh, absurdly stupid were High Commanders, yet it didn't incite much surprise to know the truth. I asked him about points of view about navy and overall conduct of soldiers on the front line. He seemed to have very strict ideas how voidsmen should fight. A bit stiff and uncompromising for my taste, very orthodox, but it looked like he knew how to command ship and fleet. And right then, that was most important.

I asked him if he would want to become admiral. Of course, with my supervision and specific set of responsibilities. He wavered, caught by surprise, trying to refuse, but it was too late. My commanding decree was ready. I promoted Kwintet to status of first admiral. He would become cornerstone of navy reforms. He almost lost his mind in shock. Soldiers rose up in congratulations for new admiral. People were half happy, half skeptic about my decision. Mainly because of entrenched notion about noble cast being always on top. I had to cut celebration short and ordered Mastaf to inform Kwintet about how Maroo managed public statements and contact him to issue official notification to people, and pitch him ideas how to use eventual deal with nobles to our advantage.



Atmosphere in room brightened up. Though it was around 22 hours in the evening, I felt refreshed and ready to rumble. This gave me idea not to just sit around for Commissars but to take a look around myself. It really felt like I just got energized. I wanted to dance, check every nook, dabble into every console, restlessly came up with word games with random soldiers, look in detail at every person we went by. My boys actually asked cooks what they put in food.

As it turned out, admirals were very fond of drug bliss and liked their tea with a pinch of additional metaphrazine, which is stimulant given to soldiers before PTSD recovery therapy or neurotoxin for fun times. It didn't have serious effect on me due to my metabolism capabilities, but enough to make me feel . . . different. As soon as it was discovered, Frederick immediately came rushing to me, hoping to avoid catastrophe. Nothing actually happened, except for few awkward conversations soldiers had with me. When effect worn off, half an hour later, I was flown back to the palace. I agreed with my command squad to leave them behind and get some rest since we could not foresee how drug would affect me further. Just like I said earlier, drugs punch holes in auric field, which disturbed my healing process and coherency of mind. Nataniel brought me to the bedroom half awake. I slept like a stone that night for solid thirteen hours.



— Arrival Day [71_] — Pursuit day [57_] — Day of reign [25_] —

When I woke up at 7 in morning, sun barely rose up. First thing after getting up was to call Frederick and check status of how High Command fared. It wasn't good at all. Any replacement for admiralty was too far away for emergency call, from nine commanders, they could muster only three, and of course there was Kwintet guy. As Huges reported, even though he was capable captain, his planning and logistics were average at best. Remaining trio was entirely staff commodores and had mediocre level of grasp on our war situation. It was advisable to contact Sororitas to coordinate war effort at least for time being, since Mara and neighboring star systems did not have navy training facilities where we could gather personnel, it could be few weeks until replacement from academy came in.

Problems piling up. Not only there was no navy command, but Maroo had five vacancies as well. My instincts told me, that our adversaries would take this opportunity to slither into our ranks once again. Corporations were letting loose on the contracted workers, internal military command was compromised, main governing body on planet was functionally impaired. If only society knew how far did this crisis grew. . .

Setting aside all military problems, we still haven't found lady Alastor. Any attempts at contact have failed. Her household seemed to be vacated. Not even one serf around. Investigation forces managed to take footage of her villa and it looked like total thrash bin. Blood stains and bullet holes present in every room in guest house and there was some destruction in low level staff rooms. No damage on walls or fences, on premises or gardens. Fight was quick and intense, but no indication for reason whatsoever. Nothing was stolen and there was no signs of ransacking. From pictures and recordings brought to me later that day, it was clear that large amount of small caliber weapons were used. Shells and casing from weapons suggested standard Militarum equipment - stubbers and lasguns. It was safe to assume Blacklight aimed to assassinate someone and were able to infiltrate quite deep before fight started. All camera and holoivid data has been wiped out. Reconstructions by Techpriests were dubious at best. Hard drives glittered in burning smithereens. Digital information could not be recovered. Our best guess remained that Amelia Alastor was taken dead or alive and whoever was present on duty that day had to be permanently removed from living in most secure way, therefore were brought along, most probably in bags. Knowing what kind of game Von Rosette was playing, dreadful fate of captives could only be theorized.

But now, most pressing matter was citizens' well being. If we couldn't alleviate this disastrous working conditions, revolts and riots would slow down production of most basic necessities or even halt it. I couldn't wrap my head around just how fast this decline proceeded. To have any reference about how bad situation was, Maroo had to fill me into details. After finishing Alastor case, we met in dining hall discuss methods of approach. Just at the dinner time. Our advisors could not make it, as I left them in navy command to straighten things out. Even Kaifas could not make it on such short notice.

As he explained situation, it turned from dark to grim. Corporations could



not be influenced by legislation in any immediate effect as most of it was controlled by Von Rosette. I started to regret letting him go . . .

Even after my stun at the rally with famulous and destruction of broadcast array, public opinion was still held in binds of ecclesiarchy and their preaching. Citizens attention has been occupied by priests and priestesses on the streets, telling stories about doomsday, end times if society would not revoke hedonistic pleasures and follow them in faith of the Emperor. More or less blaming me for everything. More and more poverty was breeding from day to day as workers could not cope with demanded work loads and lost any means of support. Administrative commissions halted as production halted. From reports, thousands of workers died of exhaustion on the job, daily just to earn food. Religion was their last opium. Preachers were their last hope. Which was running out very quickly . . .

As colonel, he'd suggest to take those factories by force and restore order, which would lead to enacting marshal law, but antagonizing populus even more. And give BL excuse to play heroic defenders against new tyrannical overlord. Blacklight controlled around 20% of military infrastructure. Not to mention 4 000 000 soldiers. More over, SoS had their gruby palms puppeteering deep inside Lokinyth manufactorum. They would have greater amount of equipment and possibility to replenish it with greater efficiency. Ultimately, we had bigger fleet, but von Rosette had better technology on board his ships. This little gantry on Mara could build light cruisers but it needed resources, which were now held back. SoS had access to giant orbital shipyard and entire manufactorum. Sure, they could not challenge us in direct way, but they had multiple indirect approaches.

State of emergency could only further shake government standing. As always, I had to make decision. It wasn't easy. For few moments I would sit silent, potter my dinner with fork. This wasn't a job for inquisition or Sororitas. This had to be resolved internally. Sitting down, strolling around poking around, we tried to come up with a political solutions, in which none of us had any local experience. Even if I used Ghost as a appropriate . . . persuasion tool, it would only antagonize noble casts, but . . . what option did we have left.

And then it shone upon me; False flag operation. As square Maroo was, he wanted nothing to do with such setup operations, but it was too late. He saw twinkle in my eye as I brought this idea. There was no better way. Question remained, what manner it would be. Rest of the bodyguards stood stupefied and far gazing as they heard my suggestion. None of them was ever trained for such tactics. And no one ever thought it was effective at all. And against honor so widely preached in Astra Militarum. Naive children.

I instantly knew what had to be done. It wouldn't be a military operation. This was time for freedom fighters to come into picture. Small cells of rebels who have been underground for years, fighting with establishment against government. We would just give them some "help" to raid facilities and provide logistics, as those groups had very little to none leadership. More then anything, I would be there to coordinate attack, again donning a mask. Everyone told me just how crazy I was by even anticipating a success, until reminded what happened few weeks ago. People have such short memory.

I gave out direct order and had Maroo form an official task group to help freedom cells with this endeavor. As he made appropriate meeting and filled out



papers, I took my time with designing how would such operations commence. If anything, it was me who had the experience in fighting alongside ragtag, ad hoc, sloppy slapped together random scrub squads. It teaches you just how different is guerrilla warfare.

Gathering of random street thugs with all different purposes mixed with idealistic everyday people with guns can only happen if there is someone with strong leadership abilities. Most of time its one guy with his followers believing in his cause. Or . . . one gal.

Lines
12779-12786

Lost due to recording data corruption

In the wake of my "super genius" idea about how we can use our enemy's tactic against them, almost everyone tried to explain how risky it was. With one exception. Mastaf was on board and ready to go. In his eyes, winning a war is using any available methods to achieve goals. More than anything, he liked how unconventional my approach was.

Frederick would grimly warn me about consequences, handing over data he had about rebel cells. Maroo would get nausea thinking about political consequence, Ghost washed his hands due to direct order from temple, Lazarus was fired up for the job. Ojik And Theodolite preferred to stay at High Command to babysit new board for time being.

Before we departed, I took a walk to Abrax, asking him to open and take care of whatever was behind the door on the mezzanine in my bedroom. I gave him notice about my departure and asked to keep it a secret. He acknowledged my request and stated that techpriest would resolve this situation by tomorrow. He was considerate enough to ask me about data I required. For me, pictures and necropsy would not suffice. I wanted to have full documentation of whatever they found.

By 17 hours, Kimbly managed to scavenge old truck form suburbs while Mastaf got him change of clothes. Both of them didn't like High Command anyway. I honestly felt some nostalgia by wearing "normal" clothes for a change. It felt like I would wear fancy tight mantles and capes for too long. Some freedom at last.

This old joint we drove, was an automobile made not more then few decades ago. One of its doors, from passenger side, have been welded shut. Its hull had a sporty profile, but terribly eaten by rust. Fortunately its interior had at least some cushion to shield us from sturdy springs. Few scratches here and there, some ripped foam on the couch on the sides of pack, even some grass between joints on the roof couldn't make up for technical state. Least to say, it stood outdoors for many years, and barely even moved forward. It looked something like father once told me about.



A: Supposedly during 14 millennium there was a boom in interstellar transportation, which left large amount of fuselages of old spaceships as floating junk in space, which were cut and scavenged by private organizations for personal planetary vehicles. And I think that this truck would fit in. Amalgamation of used and junky parts.

We left palace through Sun Gate and made our way through crowded, high class part of the city. Once we got into lower city, everything begun to turn into garbage bin. I think that I forgot just how poor people were down there. Whatever was spilling out in the streets, had a very foul chemical stench. Damn, whenever I remember how pancy and spoiled I became while living in the palace . . . It was quite the wake up call. Made me feel somewhat guilty. Traffic was much more loose than normal hours, due to shortage of fuel. It wasn't too hard to notice approaching rusty spur of decomposing crib.

After two hours, we finally arrived to North Appellatus, magazine part of the port, where towers of moving parts constantly shifted containers of goods to be pulled just in time for approaching Toolifts. There was constant swarm of those drones flying to staging areas, hauling shipping from freighters. In the clunky spirals of metal and stone spires, crowd of workers and homeless filled streets to grasp whatever sun they could see behind skyscraping, mountainous facilities. Arcade path on side of the arterial line remained free of anyone. Those were reserved only for Adeptus Mechanicus. Servitors would use deadly force to ensure its purity. This part was connected to harbor and docking stations via train cargoes. Innumerable giant wagons were unloaded and stocked every day. Some of trains being miles long, boasted capability to supply a nation with all necessities in one swift course. Standard train dimensions are up scaled on Mara due to amount of food it produces for whole sector. Immense factories of Cibus Consociationis unloaded few trains a day just for export. I have seen how freighters are loaded with millions of these containers in just under one standard day. The only thing more glorious than efficiency of loading cranes is the surrounding noise.

Our destination however, laid outside transportation plants. In backyard, out in the sun, in one of those streets where only junk is hoarded, thrived a mechanic shop. That wasn't typical working place where citizens performed slave labor for cup of a soup a day. Nor did it entangle itself in any requisition economy. Out in the open, but right in the dark. Everyone knew about it but no one talked about it. It was my first place to visit after getting lost at arrival. It wasn't fun in the beginning, yet I ended up coming there many times.

Road through junkyard had to be crossed on foot. Not even dune buggy would get us through litter on the ground. Mountains of scrap hid small hangar bay inside, in which repair crew was more slacking off than working. Its owner was sad guy who everyone called Razer. Edgy and somber, extensively implanted and extensively braindead due to drugs. I wondered what kept moving in those tubes behind his head since his synapses were already fried through chemical fire.

Before we walked in, I instructed my guys to keep shut and not blow our cover. For all purposes, I wasn't the governor and they weren't my honor guard, but like me, they searched for good merchandise to sell on the outside. I haven't



noticed Lazarus did not even put his damn hat on as he engaged some mechanics with beer. I waved my hand on him in disbelief and taken Mastaf to the boss shack. Brigador readied his pistol in holster just in case something happens.

Razer wasn't interested in my return at all. He didn't even stop his clerk from working on his cybernetic arm. Not surprising, he was implant freak till the end. As goofy it might have seemed to Mastaf as he was almost hostile forward me, but such was his mode of expression. In the end we both helped each other to get our interesting stuff. His arm was after all military grade prosthetic augment for storm trooper veterans. On such remote planet it was worth quite fortune. He still owed me a lot for it.

I wanted to meet with rebels and I needed to know where to find their boss. Hooking me up with her would erase his debt for me. He grabbed vox and mumbled something to boys in bay. One of ceramite plates on the floor opened up like a hatch, throwing all the dust into the air, almost giving me asthma. Hole big enough for a Marine. It was old elevator shaft reaching underground floors. I said my thanks, after which we descended couple of meters down. In there, we met old man with bionic body, code name Polo. In almost clean environment, all the metallic dust on us shone like glitter. Elevator room had some space for junk weapons and illegal substances thrown around in wooden boxes and steel containers available for immediate extraction. Corridors like in any normal bunker, were somewhat cramped and poured out of rockcrete. Light fixtures on top corners gave a lot of illumination to see cracks in every surface.

Place wasn't big, just five rooms. One for elevator, one for stash, one for comm center, one common and one sleeping room. Two guys who sat in comm center would very much pass for command consoles themselves. I am just amazed sometimes, how much one can mutilate their own body just for fun. They looked worse than hastily botched techpriests. But did the job very well.

Polo was good at hacking into Mechanicus's communication and translating it to human language. Lots of lost cargo found new owners very quickly. Even so, all this unsolicited scalping accounted for MAYBE 1% of all losses official supply lines suffered. Pirates were much more bigger problem. Those were 90% losses Imperium accounted for. Unfortunately, this establishment was far too thin between ears to even be in contact with serious organization.

Penny was leader of local resistance movement. I mean planetary. Local is very relative term in scope of Imperium . . . Anyway, Razer and Polo were part of cell located in Capital. With intel received, I could point them to where they should call to arrange a meeting with me.

After request was filed to them, we had to wait in common room until contact was established. It took some time to decipher sea of data to get any proper info but after nearly two hours, we finally got a link. Polo contacted vice chief and told them that government had agent who could make deal with their movement. We agreed to meet in Olman City . . . That was like on the opposite side of a planet. With a bit of nagging, because I already managed to learn how to play with them, we at least had name of one of operators. We had to search for Orion in lower city. We bid quick farewells and returned to High command for transportation.

Getting to command complex was not so hard. Getting in was. Nobody wanted to believe our identities, even if we had clearance. Without call to



Frederick, who had to call to Huges who had to call staff sergeant, who had to call commanding officer, who had to . . . oh, you know how it works. We actually were met by commissar on checkpoint because no one could authorize our pass, which in turn developed in arrest. Yes, as a commander in chief I could not get to the base of my own operations, because I needed at least COSMIC 1 clearance. Fuck bureaucracy. I ripped the damn gate and throw it right into checkpoint. That gave them idea how appreciative I was about stick up their ass. It also cleared out issues of my identity. Huges greatly lamented my anger.

Trolley took us to the hangar where we met our transport. It was a sight to behold. And a heresy to answer for. Below and behold! Engine repurposed to use helium3 instead of promethium. As one could imagine, it was a secret project after all. Black Bird flew us to the Minotaur 10 air base, twenty thousand kilometers away in a matter of two hours. It is a hyper sonic low orbit shuttle. No one filled me in to details, but from construction itself I have seen, mechanicus did not design it. Much more fluent in aerodynamics. Unlike Storm Raven. Man, how does this shit even lifts off the ground I have no idea . . . I mean I know, but . . .

As fast as was our flight, Olman city was located another 80 kilometers from M10. From Minotaur 10 base, heli took half an hour to take us to outskirts of the city. Which gave us another half an hour walk. I really started to doubt why do people like to make their life hard with such long outdated technology as walking.

Night was approaching as sun had set already behind Olek Mountains. Pinky clouds gathered slowly over city. Lush forests and vast farms surrounding city were in full bloom and even from afar, one could smell sweet nectar of Urtuk honey. It was one of many, untouched by genetics trees that bees were drown to. Its blue flowers covered almost whole tree, protruding from numerous, long twigs. As most of forests would have green tint to it, in there, it was almost sky blue. River Magasta was kept crystal clear, allowing for several very rare species of fish live in nearby midland lake. Olman seemed to be total opposition of Elkor hive city. It had around 1 000 000 inhabitants, and clean, colorful streets. Houses built of light sand stone. A place most detached from political turmoil that mainland went under. Even if this was somewhat lesser city, people surely liked to gather in large groups outside of walls in multiple, small parties.

Unfortunately, due to recent riots, outsiders were not allowed during curfew and needed right of passage to enter. Taking off my mask wouldn't result in anything. I doubted they even cared who is governor, much less take random guy seriously with his claims. Dark was coming up and we would have to spend night outside walls. Our only chance was shanty town. By itself it wasn't loaded up with technology, but simple, survival inventions. With so many repurposed machines, any techpriest would have a pump attack, looking at their mutilated sacred work, dismantled. It somehow reminded me of humility I partially lost while in the office. Dreaming on cloudy, fluffy sheets in warm and plentiful house sure cut you off from any hardships simple folk has to go through. To tell you the truth, I somewhat felt insecure thinking I would come back to life of a vagabond after all of it. At first I had problems accepting it and now I had problems giving it up. Roaming was part of my whole life, unable to settle for long anywhere in the galaxy, but then it seemed like distant past.

We had to look out for a den and we had to do it fast, because night was growing cold. I, sure as hell, did not want to sleep on a bench outside. We had to



walk all the suburbs around to finally find tourist accommodation hotel. Laws did not prohibit from making business outside city, but sure it did cost an arm and leg. If I wasn't so stupid to show land lady a gold coin to pay with, it would settle on some silvers. They did not trade requisition. At least we had warm room with a bathroom, whatever state it was. Boys being boys, would like to have few bottles of local specifics but there was no trading hub for that nor supply point. Especially when Olmann was famous on whole planet for its inventory of fine, organic foods and liquors.

Those two were looking like bandit muscle and it would be impossible for them to gain any trust from locals to trade anything. Besides, I had the most experience in trespassing forbidden places. This was kinda good idea. I could just take a walk unbounded by any shadows following me, at least for few hours.

Night, at such far out settlement is my kind of time. It was mostly such places where I stayed and made a living if needed, for most time. As far I remember, night walks along rivers was my favorite thing. Peace and quiet with sparsely anyone around, music festivals in background. Even though I wouldn't take my time, I genuinely enjoyed a walk for first time since weeks. Luck would have it that elderly man was returning home from fields and we had a chat. Very friendly an talkative man. He was refreshingly cheerful, funny with mustache already yellowed out due to smoking. Old muscles had grown from farm work, as did his belly thanks to all the beer. In fact, he was working in brewery outside city walls and we made a deal for the evening. He had a small stash of mead brew at his garage. At first, I wanted take all those bottles it in a canvas bag, but when I told him where we stayed for night, he laughed out and gave me a backpack. His cousin worked at the inn and would pick it up after we left. But then . . . comes the payment. He suggested that he was opened for alternatives, yet was very reluctant to take any chips. Once I showed him a gold coin, his eyes widened and mouth started to droll. I had to make it clear that few bottles of whatever alcohol was not near worth it, but we made a nice deal. His house had welding equipment so we cut coin into quarters, which he took one of them. Gave me some special brews, tossed over few fruits, chunk of locally grown meat and some bakery. Even gave me a knife to cut all of it. Backpack went from heavy to loaded as we parted ways.

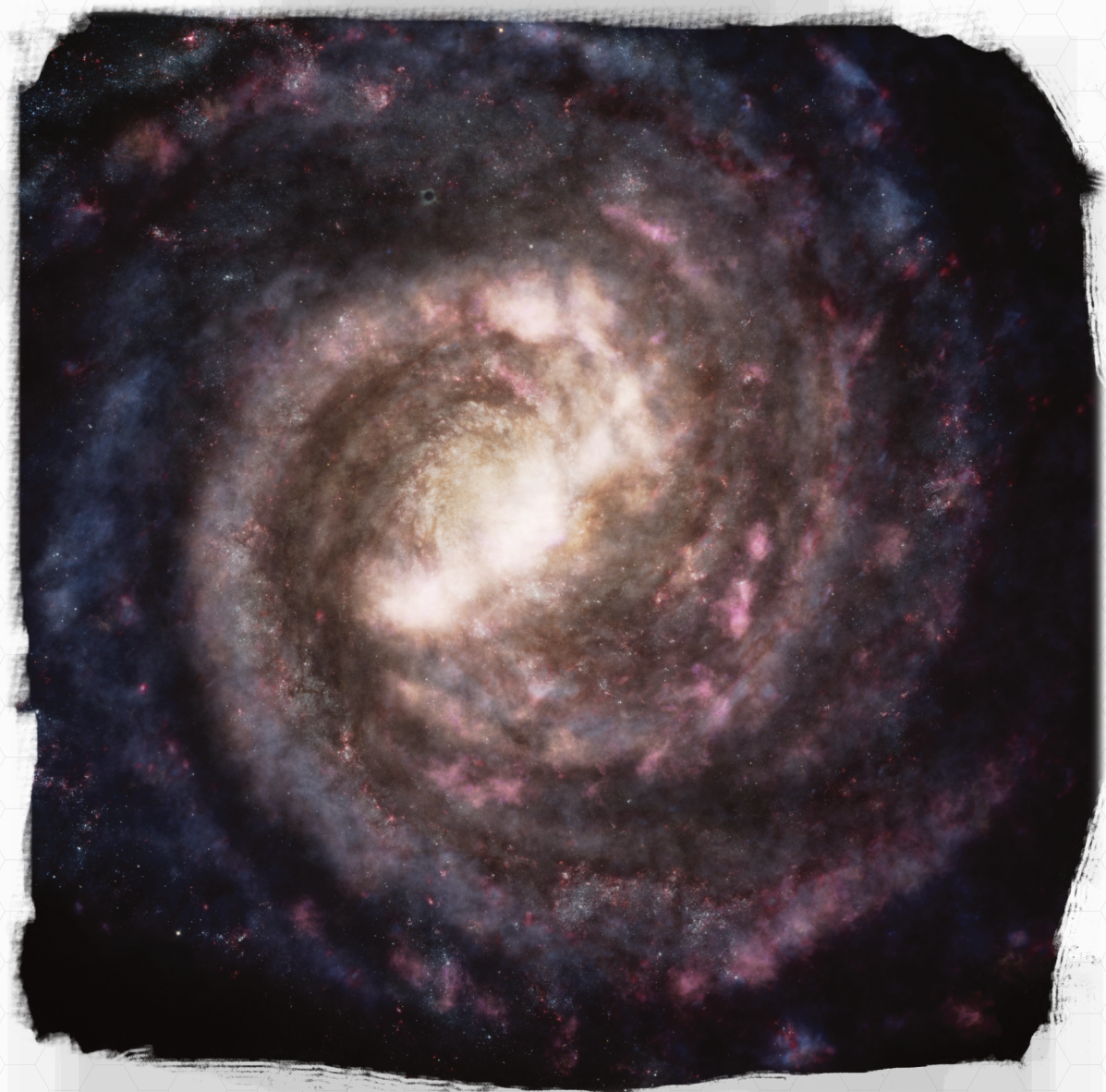
When I returned to room, it instantly shone with holy light of ecstasy as these two browsed through hauled wares. In few more minutes of sapping the goodies, I explained how I acquired our feast. They were amazed how easily it went. We sat for few more hours talking about random stuff, avoiding anything connected to real mission or actual reasons. They liked to know me a bit further since they never met "governor" quite like me. I gave them few vague examples and mentioned something about myself, that had nothing to do with my actual being, after which we went to sleep.

I guess lying became my second nature after all those years of strife. Sometimes I caught myself in a lie as I speak it out. It isn't something I am proud of, but ... such was my life that I had to learn it, and later, fight it. On the other hand, I never actually told a hard lie, to never loose myself in all those false accounts. Besides, so much happened in my past, that forgetting one or two of those from some distant past was just a normal thing. All of it to protect my true identity.

That night was cold, even under a blanket. The fact that I was a governor



suddenly felt surreal. This feeling ... I don't even know how to express it in words. Maybe a void would be a proper thing. Loneliness was eating my soul bit by bit. For millennia, I didn't give it much attention, yet my recent encounter with Ada had my issues resurfaced and now it was ... very uncomfortable. I felt hollow and alone, even in presence of other people. Fortunately, those nagging feeling had short lifespan, so about 2 AM local, I finally fell asleep.



— Arrival Day [72_] — Pursuit day [58_] — Day of reign [26_] —

In the morning, all bad feelings healed up and I could think straight again. Around 9 AM, as sergeant came from morning check-up, Mastaf finally woke me up. I was seriously tired both on body and mind due to all those things that happened in such short time. Aching back and sore neck didn't help the situation. Even if I had pillow and some “soft” mattress it was still old. Springs with already used up cushion covered with few other blankets to lessen for the inconvenience. In the end, it was very uneven sleeping.

After twenty minutes, we were ready to leave and get to the job. Streets, even in the morning, were already filled. People rarely worked any job whatsoever around these parts. Automation helped to eradicate need for most of the labor, but that meant centralization of wealth, and of course power over the masses. Even if mildly free of everyday combat, there was a price to pay. And the class distinction was very prevalent. Those unfortunate enough not to have a job were destined to roam outside walls, expecting to get fed scraps by local government. Not that they couldn't get in, but the living cost of citizen was just dramatic. On the other hand, it was a place for bourgeoisie, so anyone with a job had fairly lavish living.

We, as I had planned, tried to blend into the crowd. Looking like pauper got me nowhere. There were no strict rules who get treated how, but the long tradition of segregation, left streets clearly divided. The part that petty scrubs could roam around, and the juicy part, where people were scared to walk into. Guards were not your standard IG patrols. Guards in inner city wore polished, shiny armor, with multitude of additional accents and battle useless attachments. Wide streets were sparsely patrolled, but the sight of knights with giant two handed swords and fancy gold pistols was impressive enough to know to become scarce in a moments notice. Four guards and knight at the entrance gate to the city was enough to make sure nothing caused a ruckus.

As we traveled into the city and tried to search for anything reminding of an uprising that happened mere three weeks ago, was nowhere to be found. The only difference was in the guards. Knights, were actually stationed at city hall as elite troops to guard Myon, the city's mayor. After this whole debacle with common people rising against authority, they have been deployed into the city. And how very effective they were...? Deal was simple. You could roam about your business, but as soon you made even slightest remark about ruling family – you were beheaded on sight. And we had a chance to see it for ourselves.

It was about noon. Some drunkard buggers from one of the tavern, those things actually still exist in rural areas, started a commotion in front. At first they only got beaten up by two knights with batons for disturbing order. A broken nose and few bruises. It did not matter, that those men were nobleman in status. Law and order before all. At first I thought it was actually a nice change from all the chaos in the “mainland”, where Guardsmen responded maybe to 5% of the actual reports.

Needless to say, wealthy citizens were very upset and started another yelling rampage. It did not made an impression upon law enforcement. One bad remark was enough to warrant death, about how unrightful and disgraceful was



reign of “his lordship Myon”. Some noise rose within crowd and in a blink of an eye they were separated from everyone else. Street became dead silent after soldiers beheaded them on curbs, right in front of everyone. There was no running away. One, who managed to slip their grip at did not get beheaded, got sliced in half by massive power swords. We saw everything from window of that tavern. About five minutes later, IG detachment would come to pick dead bodies and close the case. Such was an ordinary day in that place.

I didn't know what to think about it myself. There were too many things to worry about. And there was nothing I could do in that situation. Well, technically there was, but... you know how it is. It made me question validity of this mission. Mastaf was well aware of situation and urged me to do nothing. He insisted we couldn't get caught in a petty drunken brawlery. Olman district was allowed to have different laws than rest of planet due to its special food production capabilities.

Situation muted the place for a minute or two, but five later, it was noisy again. As we sat in there, I took off my mask and just sat with hood on. Now that I think of it, it wasn't even necessary. My hair is so damn bushy it looked like I stuffed a haystack under.

Kimbyly was carefree as always. Mastaf agreed to let him drink a beer even if on duty, to help us blend into the crowd. Brigador, on the other hand had nice fried pork rib for a meal. He himself was more or less used to have nice things as elite commander.

We tried to blend into surroundings, but it was very difficult. Those two looked like hired gun bodyguards. Casual clothes but weaponry that was high end military grade. And of course the military drill manners or personal conduct couldn't be concealed. Only I behaved like an . . . ordinary non-ordinary person? You know . . . like someone who is not from town but not actually conspicuous.

Mastaf tried chatting with me. He tried. But he knew that I wasn't the talkative type. About anything. Fortunately, Kimbyly unleashed made up for the three of us. He even tried to pick girls in front of the bar, until he got scorched by his officer.

It wasn't until twenty minutes more, that a detachment of soldiers with a knight walked in, in search for someone. Armored man just stood in the middle of bottom floor with his helmet rotating slowly around, while guardsmen swept upper segments.

As if it was not obvious, his gaze slowly turn towards us. Lazarus finally shuts up his gob and sits quietly on the bench at the table. We were so out of place. . . . I was so out of place. Even if my hair is my pride and joy, they are not something you can miss, and If not for that hooded coat, the plated jumpsuit would be entirely exposed. Harnesses of their weapons laid back in corner, next to the wall, with custom made plasma pistols, fresh from governor's armory. One look at Mastaf's clean cut, black hair and you knew that his eyes meant business. Kimbyly, no matter how much he tried, couldn't shrink enough to hide big body under his tight V-shirt. Also his skin color did not match local aristocracy.

Even before knight got close to our table, he'd start to make remarks of our weird composition in this place. He asked then, in this cliché threatening and imposing manner “I have never seen you before...”. Cutting in, before my boys could do any damage, I replied him with smirking and soft “thank you”. After that,



they would just stay put and let me do the dealing.

Guard was clearly set back by my little remark. He took slow paced steps toward us and readily put his hand on his hip, but before he could draw sword from sheath I told him gently, “you don't have enough gold on you”. All that time I was not showing my face, being turned sideways to him. At least in hope hood covered my face. To reinforce my standings, I would just take a sap of my tea. It made him lay down his hand on the hilt while other hovered next to his body.

If I just let them play conspiracy, it would be a pain to spin it afterwards. Guys quickly caught up on my idea. Just in time, as guardsmen were coming down from stairs to the exit. They have found nothing and informed their superior of the result, after which he left our table and followed soldiers to modified troop transport. Enough to be suitable for elite knight.

We didn't talk about it, and pretended that nothing ever happened. Mastaf finished his meal and we were ready to go. The cashier was not impressed with my gold coin as a payment. To him it was probably a normal thing, but size was far to different. Mine was like four times bigger than what is normally in circulation. He didn't want to take it and demanded payment in silver. I gave him quarter cut from previous day and left.

Whole day was spent on searching anything about the resistance people. Its not that easy to find rebels who want to stay hidden. Of course, it was all for nothing and curfew drew near. As rabble who lacked citizenship, we had to leave city walls. It was yet another night in the cold. Unlike previous day, we had some time to search for appropriate accommodation. It was already sunset when we finally setup ourselves in a proper hotel room. This time it was worth half gold coin I spent on it.





— Arrival Day [73_] — Pursuit day [59_] — Day of reign [27_] —

Another day brought very very very very bad weather. After two weeks of drought, sudden downpour was a blessing for surrounding crop fields, but it flooded the city with enough discharge to choke canals. It was impossible to not get wet when out in the streets, so once again, we decided to visit the same tavern. Plaza, where marble bridge lead to the upper city was empty. All the little shops seemed to be deserted. Restaurants had no guests outside and hardly anyone inside. The tavern was empty as well. Old, wooden chairs and benches made of dark and heavy wood so widespread on Mara, looked very sad. In such poor weather everything looked sad. Especially the cashier. Not only he was somber but had additional red blemish under eye. We ordered more or less the same as previous day and sat ourselves in the same spot as yesterday. While we consumed in peace, heavy rainfall lessen into drizzle. Steely sidewalks and rockcrete buildings begun to cover with a wispy mist. Clouds sagged down and I couldn't make tops of the buildings in the upper city. Cathedrals and spires have been cut off from mortal world. Even the bridge that was more or less 40, maybe 50 meters up high, begun to fade in fog.

I was very drained, out of life force, feeling like sleeping off whole life. In meantime of waiting for my tea, I just leaned against frame of window, which was more comfortable than one would imagine. This view provided perfect position for spotting someone coming from bridge. In moment of frivolous mind darkening, two of my officers started to behave like high school girls – leaning to whisper some stupid observations that interested no one, and showing themselves something with hand gesture game. As their game started to get out of control, Kimbly hit his pint and almost spilt beer on tablecloth around. He tried to dry it with napkin and put everything back, but we noticed a name carved in elegant letters on side of the table. It got them curious and made them search for another one. As it turned out, there was roughly 9 names carved in equal spacing alongside benches. One “seat” not yet signed was exactly where I sat. It dawned on us instantly that something was not right. It seemed very important someone carved name of a mayor and eight other names on the table never used by anyone. Except for us. Mastaf looked at cashier. He immediately cowed and run away. Flicker of a fate had it, that a contingent of knights just rolled down in escort of two nobleman, who, oh irony, headed for the tavern. In haste, those two made the table and then sat somewhere else. I thought it would be best to just stay put and pretend nothing happened. They have already seen me through window. I straighten up and sat properly on the bench. Hands on table in basket manner.

It was maybe a minute or two since they came in, but the waiting seemed like a second, before I knew, they were already having coats taken care of. In nonchalant moods, came closer to the table and sat, seemingly, on their respective places at the same table as me. If I remember correctly it was Horacio and Ottosin. One sat at the end of my bench, the other one, one seat from the edge on the opposite side. That one was old, with gray hair and visible, silvery augmentation on skull temple. He conducted himself with confidence and experience, clearly upper in ranks. The other one, younger by half. And he was your trite visage of playboy. Wavy hair brushed away on sides and two days worth of beard. Keen sight in his eye and... ounce of slithery contempt in his smile. Both of them had



grand, green robes, with a floral, blue silk embroidery woven into the material. Gold plated high boots and gold braces, intricately decorated with stones as well as succinct reliefs, were unspeakably vivid in such dark environment. Gold threads trims on jackets and red capes. High collars with gold shoulder pad vests. But one thing I could not miss entirely were their rings. One could say plain, with a small skewed engraving on the perimeter, but ... made of Auramite. Substance so rare and hard to work with, that only Artisans of Custodes can handle it with ease. I know that hue and color very well. Even if my optic senses would fail I know its distinct, subtle electromagnetic and energetic null presence. My astral body was more than convinced those were real. But it was just a beginning of my problems.

Next thing I know, “Horacio” guy throws around petty joke about weather, but it seemed to connect to “Otto” guy. They did not seem to even notice me. I knew it was a bad position to begin the conversation. Good thing I had a mask, or I wouldn't be able to hide the excitement.

They ostentatiously said nothing more and just sat in quiet, smiling viciously to themselves. They seemed so amused that it required to break eye contact between them. I was still, like monk. My two sidekicks knew not to butt in, least they stirred hornet's nest. I don't know about Mastaf, since he had back turned to me, however Lazarus was ready to drop his pint and start shooting whole block back to oblivion. Group of Imperial guard patrolled square, making sure no one got outside to disrupt our view, knights stood quietly, albeit somewhat nervous – one, that stood at the entrance would gaze surreptitiously few times. But then . . . silence befallen upon locale. Dead silence. I could hear freezer hum, ventilator spin and even power running through cords in walls.

And then ... older guy leaned forward towards table, interlocking fingers. I knew the moment was drawing near. With a slight smile on his face, which was smiled back by younger one, he placed his order: “One tea for our lord governor, please”. Part of me petrified, but part of me was very quick to twitch and look around for an exit out of this situation. They caught me off guard. Red handed. With hand in a cookie jar. In total surprise.

Both my officers impaled his back with a nervous gaze. I . . . was partially crazy angry and partially helpless. My head waved from side to side, not actually looking at them. It was beyond belief how easily Reitziger outplayed me. More than this, someone, somewhere disclosed my location, and there was only few people who knew where I was. More than a betrayal, there was that fact that someone LET me do this for a time before revealing themselves.

I would find the answer really quickly. As the waiter brought me pitcher with warmer and cup for tea, alongside chalice of sugar and plate with lemon slices, elder guy put his hand under the coat. At first, my thought was “assassination”. My guys were exactly on the same page. But he pulled out an envelope. It was quite succinct. Made of a sturdy, brilliant smooth Windergrin paper and stamped, with big, wax seal of unknown heraldry. It had a nice scent. Like a perfume of a lady . . . yes . . . I knew that scent . . . I could not forget it even if I wanted to . . .

Opened quickly, watching to not to damage it, but had to make sure who was the sender. In spur of a moment I ripped my mask out of its jaw harness, tearing it, without a moment of hesitation. It was her name on the front, her scent, but the author was signed ER . . .



Reitziger . . . found me right there, just in the middle of special op sortie, unknown to anyone but my closest honor guard, probably even to my own self to a degree.

Letter consisted of many superlative praises for me. And other propagandist bullshit. It was large piece of scroll parchment, folded in three, written on both sides, each paragraph started with an ornamental initial, as he would be addressing a noble. Well... he actually knew I was . . . of royal origin, after all.

All in all, he had a proposition. Wanted to sell out Amschel and rest of rebels for a favor. He did not specify what was it. Only hinted that it was scientific helping out. Deplored vanishing of Amelia Alastor and commanded recent changes at High Command. He knew it all As it was not enough, he finished ... with a sentence hoping of “our” . . . reunion. That psycho perfectly knew how to mess me around. Just at the time when I decided to put my runaway fantasies to rest and managed to finally look straight before me, he did it away with one damn sentence. No denying I would love to see Ada once more. But then, who would not want to.

After reading through it all second time, I put it on the table pretending to read third time, but sunk in thoughts of what can actually be done about it. Palace was surely compromised. What kind of shenanigans someone could pull by the time I was out. How much of it was playing into his hand. How much was I wasting my time. How did he know. How much did he foresaw. Who are those two guys. What did this table mean. Was I sitting there because of my own will. How much have I been influenced. How much my intel was tampered with, and other questions which couldn't be answered.

On the other hand, I could see old man's curiosity growing with each minute that passed, until he completely stared at me. I wondered how many electric eyes were watching. . . I got hit by my governor's responsibility very hard. Last two days felt like traveling on the road again. Free from this . . . political hell. But alas, it was a rude awakening and I was back as the governor. The adrenaline rush fired my synapses up, hyper activating my cognitive parts. I started to search my memory in any trace of a group under Edmund which could be useful for his purpose right now. I remembered that blond geezer said about compartments within compartments. On one occasion he said that not many knew the symbol of Society Of Sovereign, which would be my starting point. I took a knife and carved it's symbol on silver plate. Younger one had no idea. Older one had a twinkle in his eye – he clearly was in the know, which meant he had at least some connection to whole charade. With a swing of a hand he emptied the place and asked me to do the same with my own men. I obliged. Now we were alone. As some kind of cliché soap opera drama with no imagination whatsoever. Yet again. I can't remember how many times already. Reason why such guys shoo everyone away is because no one really knows how everybody else is ket in the dark. Never trusting anyone makes you a pit of black knowledge. And black hole of a company.

It actually helped me to relax a bit. Just a bit. In desperate attempt to disguise my emotions I started to actually make a tea, gathering ideas what we can talk about. It was a really long tea brewing.

Still in alert mode, I started with questions about how they knew about my position, followed by his position, his “patron”, how is he standing with ER and did he know about content of the letter. Of course, most of response compiled



courteousness into big, fat stack of nothingburger. He just told me he doesn't know anything I'm talking about. So I inquired does he know why I am governor in the first place? On which he smiled viciously and responded “because we made you”. WE? That was a very subtle hint so I dragged further – asking how and why would they know about my powers. Another over assured look in his eyes and the same line. This time I was sure he is full of it and pretends to play upper hand. But was he? Wild thought about “priesthood” of SoS just came rushing to me.

That was it. He could be one of the originals that set in motion this whole campaign. He did not fit descriptions of SIN but could be one of his puppets, working beside Reitziger. After all I never got to know what was Edmund's ultimate goal. I never knew what was SoS ultimate goal. Ervin turned out to be a pawn, useful idiot. Documents never said what made SIN introduce Edmund into the committee. They never stated that there could be anyone else who knew about whole plan. As a matter of fact, I relied on those documents too much and forgot to think by myself. It was indeed a rude awakening. In the end, he could be not so full of it after all.

In meantime, I sap that tea of mine in deliberate haste, almost burning my mouth with temperature. As I got up from my seat, he said that I am yet to give an answer. There was nothing to communicate and I just said no. One step out of table, he brought out case of BB. He said that I could finally see Black Betty. That she is real . . . but I don't have much time. If Reitziger doesn't get a word, she might be lost forever.

From one side, it pinched me. Got me worried. Suddenly, an invisible grip taken hold of my mind. Desire flew through my feelings. It felt like I wasn't done with her after all. Even if I was perfectly aware of situation, my heart couldn't be reasoned with. Yet another time, that hole in my soul made me want to run away. The one moment of hesitation was very showing how conflicted I was in that matter. I wanted to run away. My logic self screamed to just run away, but conflicted with thoughts about what he said, despite having all the wisdom in the world, I stayed despite sensing his bluff.

I guess it was his victorious smirk when he saw me torn apart at that moment which helped to make my decision. I was, after all, a governor and couldn't, due to my congenital quality, just forsake whole world for my whims. In the end, I bid him farewell. At least tried, because knights had already barged exit with seven bodies of steel. It wasn't an option for these guys. Entrance corridor was too narrow to even get past 4 of them. With weapons drawn in hand, they awaited signal, but this . . . was good.

Their visage threw me out of doubt and most importantly helped to regain steadiness of mind. Anxiety faded and I could fee reality around me again, finding myself in comfort zone - with platoon of enemies trying to gun me down. I started to actually remember who was the most powerful guy on the planet, if not in galaxy. I mean, they could not hurt me, and notion of loosing someone I never actually knew, not even knowing they existed in first place, was starting to get silly. There was still time to turn this in my favor.

Its not like I never did such things before. It's just... I never felt properly when dealing with those so called “elites”. They are all borderline service to self. Even if they are exercising their right of free will, it still fills me with... something... which cannot even be dressed in words ... Not only uncomfortable but outright displeasing. I have seen enough in my life to know how it all ends in



the long run. Its like a mental blockade . . . Might be my alter yelling to run. Yeah . . . Back then it was just instinct. Like a muscle memory. A conditioned reaction of subconsciousness.

Whatever the case, I backed down and sat in front of him. For starters I let him speak to me about offer and my decision, insisting to review my position and make the RIGHT choice. I poured me some more tea and elegantly sap sip by sip as “Horacio” tried to talk me to death. Whatever Ottsin was, it was very visible that he smiled under his hands and being intrigued by my . . . looks, throwing few questions about it.

My response wasn't immediate. I took my time thinking. Two minutes of silence felt like two seconds. Still, nothing came to my mind, so we went with casual talk, asking how I could even trust that Ada was alive, much less BB, without hiding my disrespect for their clandestine organization. And that I am not going to participate in their technocratic rule.

He would dismiss my worries with pathetic attempt of convincing me of their best intentions. He and Reitzger had left ranks of those societies and decided to make new, better world, where people could strive for greatness, a pure meritocracy. As much as I could not understand and see through Reitziger, that guy was really bad actor. Each word smelt like a lie in every dirty self reassured buffoon. Such half brain-dead folks weren't a challenge. But Edmund . . . Yes. Even though I knew and understood, I could not see where this got me on his chessboard. It looked like he did not have any plan at all. I knew that he sent those two clowns SPECIFICALLY, because he knew how to get to me. And he even setup such environment for this occasion. I just did not know yet what qualities those two had, which made them the right choice. It was time to shift my thinking.

I did not speak to this “Horacio” man anymore. Instead, to Reitziger's puppet. As soon as his presence vanished, treating him like a talking terminal, situation made more sense. I even perceived him differently. After tapping into his auric field, words suddenly attained new meaning. The manner in which he conducted himself reminded me of something. The letter he gave me wasn't a letter at all. Just another piece of set, to put me in place. By having all this circus play out, he wanted to put me somewhere. On what path? He expected me to take up appropriate actions to get to a certain point. It needed time, to think how to actually see things and how to respond. Just like Reitziger played games with me, I needed to start playing games with him. And this . . . Horacio . . . he was perfect opportunity to start playing multi layered match of chess against Reitziger.

I asked who he really was and boy was he so pleasant to finally present himself as Myon von Schmissel, the very Mayor of Olman city and overseer of Olman Fields. I pursued his history with scientist. Of course, he wouldn't say much. Only that this connection consisted of uncanny girls. He was very suspicious of my questions. And very aware of their implications. One thing you cannot say about people who spring high in such uncompromising world, that is politics, is they are stupid. They act like one, they play like one, but they do know how to play this game.

I intended to play along and agree to the letter's premise. I just needed to make it at an angle that would allow me to put it into greater perspective . . . and further possibilities. Up till now, I behaved nervous, intentionally retaining such image and even occasionally stuttering. He believed my acting. I had a leeway in that area. I never actually cared what mayor was thinking, but he seemed to enjoy



himself. Must have felt nice to have hook on governor himself. Amateur. I read in his soul like in open book.

After some more battering through his defense, I changed approach and started to shape him enough so he would call back to Edmund and presented my case favorably to my actions. I demanded few things. Full disclosure was first, instead of Amschel I wanted to know location of Ada, I also wanted knowledge about inquisitorial business and connections of Sisters of Battle. And then some random demands I do not remember. Mostly red herring trying to make impression of caring about my personal whims more. Of course, it wasn't going to convince frogface . . . ehbbb, if I only knew how naive and futile it was.

On the other hand, Marcus finally became flexible to my psychic influence. He asked me how did I feel about criminal lords cartel right in plain sight. Funny how those people are always asking about their standing. . . I wasn't preoccupied with petty drug dealers or weapon smugglers. I just warned him not to interfere with my paycheck and got up. This time everyone stepped aside, making way for my way out.

My men were waiting on the outside. Nervous. Very nervous. Its just the way they leaned against wall of house and looking around. Being professional they wouldn't let emotions show how uncomfortable it was to be helpless. Aside from 20 knights, 3 squads of guardsmen patrolled square and backyard. All very well equipped. Too good for guardsmen one might add.

There was nothing else to do for me anymore in that place. I was sure that all of it was just a scheme to draw me out. There was a silver lining, though. I finally snapped out of my lethargy and begun to fight back. It wasn't particularly brilliant at first glance, but it definitely set me on the right path. Instead of leaving matters into other's hands, I decided to take reins for myself. I had Mastaf contact command and pick us up – the op was a bust.

Shuttle arrived about two hours afterwards. Before that, I just walked between fields to calm down and cool off. I needed moment of clarity to put everything into place. Had some time to think about where does the grand plot lead. Of course, I had no immediate knowledge of deep state, but could conclude some of the implications of my presence. One and most important was that Reitziger knew my identity and knew my genetic lineage. I was sure he wanted to do something with it. And I was sure that he was not just another petty, megalomaniac, self indulged psycho trying to rule over the world.

Maybe he was. A little. He had those traits as well, but . . . he just wasn't the type.

I know he certainly did not like notion of selling his girls, just by seeing how he took care of Ada, even if it was just one night. I know that there was a mountain of knowledge I did not possess and making wild guesses would leave me nothing, so I just put everything into separate categories and made a checklist of what do I need to know next. First thing was to uncover where were his laboratories situated.

Shuttle arrived on Astra Militarum landing pad at outer outpost. I actually was relieved not seeing Valkyrie. Another flight at those bare bone benches and I would flip. What picked us up was rapid relocation transport for . . . elite officers. Mighty decorated four engine AV. Luxurious interior of red cushion, wood panelings, gold coverings, silver linings, and drink bar. Must say it was quite



cramped compared to what is, was, present at the palace in other vehicles. Its most important feature however was its speed. It was created with cooperation of secret space program after all. More than enough to get us back to Minotaur 10. And while we were waiting for Blackbird to arrive, we could actually enjoy ourselves.

As we waited, we talked quite a bit over game of cards. I was surprisingly talkative about recent events, dropping that wall of mine for a time. Brigador did not waste opportunity. He'd ask me questions about any detail I had found to this moment. Lazarus, kindly, just stayed out of it. He had his bourbon to fill him up.

Our conversation was merely a voiced summary of everything that had happened. My goal of inviting freedom fighters to our side drifted away. Not because we could not track them, but because it looked like this organization was just another splinter cell of Crimson Raiders. I had to stop thinking like grunt and start to think bigger and wider. Not in terms of forces amassed but by control exercised over the force. I delineated plan to follow and gave Mastaf some guidelines what to do about infiltrators at palace, being one myself many times and knowing the most annoying things that throw you off in those situations. Then, our transport was ready and we flew back to High Command.

It was evening, somewhat past 20 hours local when we touched down on EMPTY airport. It wasn't due to heavy rain. Commissar Huges came to pick me up and escorted to Albatross waiting on the other side of complex. He recalled all military flights in region on previous day due to another incident, in which military gunship wing raided one of the periphery living hubs and used extreme force to mass exterminate inhabitants, just about two hours after we departed for Minotaur 10 base. Damage consisted of two whole hubs leveled to ground, with almost 100 000 lives lost. Apparently perpetrators were still at large and there was no clue to who could do it. All video logs were clean and investigation yielded no clues. Shot down units never uncovered any evidence. He told me that someone made a lot of preparations before. Security clearances have been authenticated, even biometric passes have been greenlighted. He grounded all vehicles on base to count inventory and flight logs. No clue whatsoever of missing munitions or gunships. Everything was squeaky clean. And that was the most suspicious factor. I haven't seen single command bunker that could account for every bullet, blanket or shoelace. This proved that logs were forged, but we still didn't have clue as to who could infiltrate High command to this degree on such scale. I left him with a blessing to resolve the case and got back to palace.

Place was buzzing with rumors after that incident. Fortunately, my assistants could contain awareness of feral rituals. I have seen some dignitaries and nobles returning to their offices, mostly industrialists. Maroo assured me that they were on our side, even relinquishing some of their assets to gain goodwill of the governing body. I even seen seraphim squad with palace guards patrolling around.

Unfortunately, my head was filled with emptiness. Something held me back from thinking properly. Every time we tried to make informed decision or have meaningful discussion, I could not summon words to speak nor information to pass. Of course, council wasn't happy about that and started to ask brigador about what happened, while I sat in oval viewing hall to pick myself together. After 23 hours, Emmy, somewhat my personal maid, brought me few pieces of chocolate cake and jug of tea.



Normally, 20 hour would be time when everybody packed home, but not that day. After such incident whole spire was still in uproar, trying to deal with administrative nightmare. Fruits served in dessert chalice was just what I needed. With such infuse of sugars and vitamins, I was still ready to work. For better or worse, I returned to council room and was met with warm welcome, which I returned by waving hand back to everyone.

Everyone actually cooperating together, instead of bickering about who is going to be the leader, became a pleasant surprise. Maroo was still in shambles and looked like he was hit by a truck. If not for Frederick, it would be hard to maintain any order. Instead of one circle table, room had now five separate, with different purposes. Advisory body swelled up in numbers. Two days ago, it was just 5 of us, now it was like 30. I did not like that idea, but when Fred begun to explain to me how every member was actually a specialist in their field, I let it slip. Apparently, Maroo gathered intellectuals instead of nobles.

Legal team composed of seven personas had nice corner in back of the room, near window. Six fleshlings, four of noble houses, yeah, and techpriest.

Industry management committee sat under opposite wall, not far from entrance. Magos Kaifas, Abrax, LEX-MU, two nobles, and four people looking like businessmen from guilds.

Social Conduct Department was most colorful with all that aristocratic dresses and suits. There was a noblewoman from night I took over. She seemed puffy proud of becoming director of a department which sprung to life overnight. She had two sister famulous and one priest, who watched over Makbat Borrod and seven other overseers from other major cities. They sat around table surrounded by lavish couches, mainly talked trash, but it was just starting out and I was told that it was more of a social meeting today than actual business. Figures.

Same went for Strategic Planning table. My sidekicks were sitting with general Falun, captain Strangler, commodore Nikkis, and tried to get friendly with sororitas girls, but sister Leonida was not in the mood. It was awkward and painful to say anything, but oh how interesting to watch. Fortunately, they had table close to doors.

In the middle of the room, we had open buffet table for everyone.

Main table was located under windows. Maroo sat on the throne with back to the outside world, signing papers with super extravagant quill. I was beginning to see that he tried to look the part he was playing. Even his bodyguards now had red capes and golden ropes attached to shoulder straps. It was supposed to be my table, I mean governor's, so all of it looked pompous AF. Resembling more altar than table, could surely serve 10 people, not just 4. Everything, from white marble top surface to golden cherubs and cushy throne. 4 people served by dozen serfs.

When I got closer to their "governance" department, James was not too happy to see me, so I asked why. Apparently he had enough of doing the paperwork and wished for change for a bit. One voice threw humorous remark, that everything is still on the table. They all giggled. I applauded witty commentary while circling over to other side.

In the middle sat Marcus de Estana. Had his golden goblet filled with red wine by staff he brought himself. Large plate in front of him and others filled with some meaty snacks, fruits and cake pieces. Honored me by rising drink to my propitious governorship, which other two followed. One I did not know, but he



introduced himself as Constantine Kreitlieg, head priest of the Ecclesiastes, the Cardinal, and most probably, most influential person in sector, even before Sector Lord. Third one, to my surprise and great relief was no one else than Great White Lilly of the order, Canoness Janna. My relief wouldn't be long. I sat sideways on the table to listen closer what they were actually discussing. I saw document Maroo was filling . . . Imperial Tithe allocation . . . And I knew this is going to get ugly. We have been attacked on all fronts, but this matter became most serious. There simply was not enough means. With recent closings of major production centers and mining halt due to workers' riots, we would not meet requirements even if tried. Subsector Mara was one of those worlds that had no psykers and no special troops to make up for resources, so our tithe was strictly industrial. Whatever was stored away by previous government has been cleanly swiped out few days before "summer revolution". That's how they now called it.

Imperial tithe in Haephestus was not a matter of individuals planets, but due to distance from nearest core world, whole sector was treated as one subsidiary and resources were gathered based on sector's output. Subsector in our case. It was established 70 years before, in M41.936, to shift balance of power towards Mara within 8 subsectors. This has effectively made Mara's governor VERY powerful man, being able to challenge Sector Lord over his authority. At the same time piling up responsibilities.

You know how it is with tithes, individual planets have to provide quotas to ensure whole system works. In sector's case, main export was Lokinyth's ground troop's accouterments, supplying 17 nearby sectors on constant schedule, not in packages. There wasn't manufactorum present for almost 2 500 light years, so if Lokinyth lost production, it would mean serious trouble for a LOT of people. Not feeding its population meant great loss. Even though sector had 8 agri worlds, Mara subsector owned 5 of them, effectively making us farmland of outer expanse. Our normal output reached over 187 000 000 000 000 food rations each year. And now . . . it has suddenly been cut off. This was very serious. If Tithe wasn't met, Black Ships would show up to resolve it. In most immediate manner possible we could presume. Some would be made example of.

Right now, Lokinyth was at half production. When four weeks prior uprising begun, many places went on strike as well, resulting ins vast casualties in worker population. Mining operations were stopped. Foundries gone cold. Manufactorum halted. But even so, those few days of lesser production, tithe should have been somewhat complete. It wasn't. We were behind almost 65 % of needed quota and had nothing in return. Not even food.

In our current situation, even allocating whole output and holding sectorial needs for three months would not get us required sum. Marcus could not buy such vast resources, since nobody would sell. There were no resources to buy. The only choice they had was to pursue stolen goods and ramp up the production. Legal team prepared to talk to me about it, however there was not much else to do than to pursuit those resources militarily. But then, where. I would have to dismantle most of land forces stationed within Subsector to make up the difference, and this we would be in trouble against Ork hordes. If anything I needed to double our fighting capacity. Our fleet was 85% in active service but split between eastern fringe with Orks and internal patrols where pirates suddenly spiked in activity. Of course, private armies would not help due to von Rosette's orders. And they did not want to either.



Situation was bleak. According to Janna, sisterhood was ready to fight in all strength but even 28 000 Sisters of battle at her disposal will have trouble to stop full Ork Waagh and civil war at the same time. On top of that, de Estana heard from his outside contacts, rumors of Black Ship already inbound to our sector, in order to resolve this matter. Apparently it was already seen months prior, that our worlds dropped in output as it was left unattended, due to meddling of von Rosette. I saw how chips were falling. There was only one person who cloud help us. And whether I liked it or not, I could no longer stall or deny him.

Falling deep in my thoughts left me silent long enough for Maroo to call me back, wondering if I really wasn't tired. To deflect it, I expressed my deepest concerns about coincidence of circumstances, which made Frederick suspicious about what happened in Olman City. I just told him it had nothing to do with our case at hand, covering it with failed negotiations.

I know how to lie. . .

To make sure my little lie wouldn't have short lifespan, I called over Mastaf to ask if he shared our talks from flight. He did, but only to Commissar. I asked boys to get me chair. Maroo eagerly made room on throne, but was assured he needed it more than me. He called Robert and Jason, after which they picked one of serfs and walked out. While waiting, de Estana thanked me for my assistance with his grandson, assuring to return the favor. While he explained how Vindicare assassin snuck into his mansion, after killing two dozens of his guards before wounding his heir, Maroo had me sign some documents. Of course I did not want to, but he needed governor's signature on direct orders and legislation issues. This was not part of the deal. He understood my stance, yet he still needed signature of overarching authority. There was not even one signature of mine anywhere. Even decree appointing and acknowledging new governor still did not have my sign. And never would. With disappearing of Amelia Alastor, Maroo had to take up all responsibility of her office as well, which trained him perfectly for substituting me once I was gone.

Our conversation quickly became politics when cleric begun to preach how my behavior was "unemperorish" Marcus tried to reason with me. "Lord Governor should not run around, dressed like commoners, much less in such unsightly armor!" and he had the appropriate means to upgrade my wardrobe if I choose to. Both old guys agreed however, that I should put more efficiency into strategic matters. They were right about it. For last few days I was preoccupied with my narrow vision of how it should be instead of how it actually is. And . . . kinda my own chase after Reitziger.

That last encounter with Myon awakened me. Too long have I forsaken the greater picture of what I really fought for. People of planet Mara, as in consequence whole subsector and sector, were mere subjects of this misprision. Even if I did something good with overall government, there was still myriad of slavers, exploiters and abusers in the world. Change had to be brought from the bottom, in the system itself. The very thinking of citizens and victim mentality had to be remedied. Freedom begins and ends in your mind.

In meantime, new clues showed up in case of this assassination attempt. Alongside Kaifas, detachment of skitarii helped to secure evidence as well as body of deceased perpetrator, who was killed in escape attempt. Techpriest identified deceased man as one of noble families. Young male, 32. His father was financing merchant on Duskin, next planet in star system, partaking in mining operations.



Two years before, he was dishonorably discharged for illegal smuggling. Caught red handed, yet logs did not say word about cargo. Instead of execution, he was allowed to run away, leaving his father with disgraced name. Probably recruited by Blacklight for black operations. He wasn't sure due to archives being unattainable for outsiders. This gave him impression that it was actually something very important. Nonetheless, forensic expert found assassin pumped full of drugs and alcohol. His hormones indicated prolonged sexual activity, inferred to be at most three hours before break in. It actually was important clue for investigation. Coupled with with apparel – lack of any upper clothing or shoes, with only trousers on, painted some of his actual last moments.

For purpose of our meeting, significance had gold coin purse in his pocket, which had serial number nano etched within info matrix. Those were property of Imperial treasury, or rather governing body, dated as three month old batch, minted in off-world mining colony of Galeria IV, belonging to one of SoS's investors, private bank of Gimian Duth, which was staffed by Blacklight. Slaves in gold mines were provided by Amschel. It became another target to take down. More curious was the drug that Magos detected in corpse. They did not know this substance, but I did – Cystex

A: Yes. First thing suspicious was, that we had vindicare assassin here anyway. Then I learn about assassin guild. On top of that, this . . . order, was used by von Rosette.

A: It was VERY out of place. Especially when you expect inquisition. I couldn't help but feel that someone already knew about this, using it behind the scenes.

The frenzy, which cluttered brain of assailant, driven him to the brink of exhaustion and breakdown of most tissues. Only reason he even was seen, not to mention killing. His muscles were ripped and digested from overwork, synapses burnt out, nervous system fried, bones had barely any tensile strength left. He was shot 7 times in torso, 3 in limbs and even 1 to the crotch. What stopped him was slipping off outer wall, down the cliffs right into rocks. First witness report foam sipping out of his mouth and twitches of body after death. Rest of injuries consisted of bruises, shallow cuts and extensive damage of feet – must have run for hours barefoot.

Further investigation affirmed, that he was attending one of the brothels in nearest town of de Estana parcels. Unlike any other client, he met with owner. He was last seen taking a walk in gardens with lady who was not part of working staff, and found dead two hours later, with cause being drug overdose. She had the same drug in her system but since it was a normal girl, it fried her brain like microwave. People around town reported tall, hooded figure in black mantle asking directions. Nothing else was found.

I did not know intricate connection of this event to my own story, yet it sounded familiar. A thought in back of my head, that this was yet another elaborate trick. Frederick offered official assistance in this case. It was not needed, since Kaifas, I was sure, already did whatever was possible. Our chitchat was disturbed by entrance of Abrax.

Techpriest was tactful enough to address us in most official manner with



all of the superlatives, which pleased guests. In obfuscation of his true intentions, he tried to pull me from chair to take a look at new tunnels, in which they discovered hidden in magnetic disturbances. He did not lie when he showed us hologram on his portable noosphere. There were some long and dodgy looking passages throughout whole palace spire. Knowing he did not want to present finding about altars to such wide range of listening ears, I promised that it will take only few minutes to take a look and I'd be right back.

On our way out he insisted we take Kaifas with us. I walked to table and excused him to accompany me. Governor's office was accessible directly from council room by doors in the middle of western wall. We moved to office, closed doors and setup noosphere.

As I was pouring myself a tea, techpriests exchanged information in their digital language. No idea what was mentioned. Kaifas had us perplexed when telling me that he knew about these corridors, very much admitting to lying about it. Amschel employed him to discover meaning and purpose of those passages, but he could not find anything unusual. He did not know who constructed them or where did they end. Those shafts were very well EM insulated and built long time ago. Apparently some tunnels stretched out on entire planet, connecting all major places with underground system. Sacrificial chambers were entirely different matter - those were not constructed by time of his investigation 19 years ago and had no idea why or how were they used. Valuable finding, or rather missing, were very thin layers of rust. In report from years, which he displayed on holograph next to fireplace, there is mention of overbearing rust and metal oxidization. Abrax told me that corridors were swept clean long time ago and some paths were used up to three weeks before insurgency. Less dust deposits have been detected on narrow shafts connecting simulcarum, med bay, and inner sanctum – chambers where priesthood stored holy relics. There was even a small elevator for people, running along main, hoisting shaft of spire. It could lift up to four hundred kilos, stopping at the bottom in officer's barracks loading bay. There were few stops, Medbay on top, inner sanctum, administration chancellor's backroom, lower landing pads, and finally officer quarters in bottom barracks. Thanks to those illicit passages, one could easily navigate most of crucial infrastructure without being noticed. Another discrepancy laid in additional masked openings in walls as well as sensor instruments.

During Amschel's reign, very few people would be allowed to roam palace. Even fewer would be invited by him. And those chosen few would most likely be unwanted in any place in the world.

Then, we proceeded to most uncomfortable part of examination of what we found behind altars. Dimensional scan of environment was pulled on holovid display. None of us was actually moved by any of its bestiality. Largely gutted and disfigured women in secret chamber were confirmed to be reported missing few month ago with locator microchips removed. I did not know that population was marked, but it did not surprise me, seeing how they were being treated as cattle. There were no clues found who and when abducted them, but judging from DNA sequencing, they were trafficked from southern Reina district. Only few large towns in that area and mostly poor villages – perfect targets. When Abrax showed result data of biopsy, Kaifas momentarily connected those to other incidents he heard about in inner circle, doing some orgies and sexual ceremonies from time to time, but was too far removed from bodily desires to be trusted with knowledge



about such extremes. Chamber was very well insulated and secured, which helped to preserve bodies in some extent, but rotting made it impossible to reconstruct everything in detail.

What counted the most, were marking of tools left behind. None of them were used in actual rite. Blood was already beginning to oxidize when tools were dipped. Blood in font was not exclusively human. It had animal DNA in it. A reptile DNA, and victim or sacrificial object was nowhere to be found. Wooden thrones had no traces of any kind, except for dust. Chamber, had no additional idols.

Closer inspection confirmed that it was a sexual ritual. Victims had noticeable traces of arousal drugs left, orally deposited. Pictures of corpses weren't pretty – almost thirty days of rotting. For better or worse, site was sealed until door malfunctioned via short circuit on the day of my assault. Cuts of those poor girls were done meticulously and in appropriate manner. Each had a burnt mark on forehead, right where third eye would be located, expressing eloquent maw of closely unknown beast. Most likely just authors imagination.

Most cuts were shallow, just to make someone bleed, but some, due to struggle I presume, were not clean. There were no bruises on any part of the body or no internal bleeding. It seemed as girls were kept in relative harmless environment before . . . rite . . . Just like scrolls advised. Deep wounds performed with precision, done right in spot of energetic centers. The one in the head were cause of death, but it did not mean they died painless. As there were around 60 cuts on each body, they all could be mortal wounds. Each body had them in exact spots and depth. Sexual abuse was done before, during and after the ceremony . . .

How and why nobody noticed or heard anything? Because room had a layer of soundproof materials in between inner and outer brick wall, Hidden corridors connected to hidden lift – no one would be able to spot them coming either.

I knew this wasn't the only place such things have happened, not on the planet or the Imperium. Anger filled me as I contemplated my helplessness, knowing how many millions of young people have been sacrificed like this all year round by psychopaths who I could not reach or even knew anything about. No citizen knew how truly twisted whole world is.

There was something wrong as soon as I entered magnetic field of Mara. It wasn't a thing which could be put into words or pointed finger at, but a sense. A smell in astral world. My first impression explained it with overbearing exploit of population, resulting in foul smell of local warp space. Since it covered whole planet, I thought it to be global problem, not such . . . intense and rapid black mass evocation.

My fears begun to swirl within. Looking at pictures, imagining Ada and BB laying on those stones in dread and despair. As I sunk into my thoughts for a minute, Kaifas stopped explanation, waiting until it passed. He asked me if I was alright. I told him I was . . . But I wasn't . . .

He then continued but it slips my memory. Still going through evidence of that room and connections. Seeing how unresponsive was my attention, they agreed to give me 10 minute break before switching sets to secret room inside my chambers.

As soon as he shown first picture, I immediately froze. To them it was only another witch rite. For me . . . well . . . shit got real.



What I saw, was something to worry about. Room contained four persons, stretched and bonded at x cross table. Two male, two female. All mutilated. And . . . all had chaos star etched in their chests as . . . major chaos entity sigil. Their hearths ripped out while still alive. It didn't even need evidence. It's just something those sadists do.

This was not a matter of imperial tithe anymore . . . I told to handle over the data and ordered to burn bodies to ashes, then properly bury them with appropriate funeral. I also told them that this data is bad, and if he made copies to hoard it, like they have in habit, inquisition will “investigate” them. That was enough to get them scared. They were even more curious why such precautions. I told them that I know why inquisition fleet was coming. And every servitor used in those chambers must be destroyed at once. I only said that very powerful and malevolent being is lurking in the warp.

Slaanesh cult . . . fucking psychos! . . .

A: NO! You don't get it! I . . . have the inner capability of . . . smelling, through my aetheric body, chaos stench in the warp. And there . . . it wasn't working. Something was blocking my astral abilities from day I arrived.

A: Up till then it was infallible sense. It never disappointed. Unless in null presence or warp suppressor generator like gellar field. Like apex predator could smell victim from miles away. I could always . . . “feel” corruption in the surrounding energies and in people. There were situations my senses went awry but . . . it was first time it failed this bad.

A: If this . . . thing, whatever it was, could dull MY senses, I knew that there is some very wicked power at play.

Either way . . . That sigil stirred me up and threw my stomach upside down. On top of all that mess that brought economy to stop . . . chaos cult lurked in the shadow and it was soooooooooooooooooo fucking huge. I knew what was coming, presuming whoever was this “lord”, SIN, tried to make our whole world a sacrifice for demon ascension. I sagged down in my chair and drifted away. Running away was no more a viable option. I just knew how it ends. What it would come to . . . And I was the only one on that planet who knew about meaning of those icons, fearing the worst . . . exterminatus. If whole SoS have been such from very beginning, it meant whole power structure in whole sector was compromised.

Abrax had to prone me to get any response and I had to relay any orders without alerting them to gravity of situation, asking if his database had anything concerning those sigils. He obviously said no and wasn't even lying. I told him to seal all data and prepare a copy of it for my PDA without disclosure even to Adepta Sororitas. Matter was very urgent. More than tithe, even more than whole industry. If we ever had a demon infestation . . .

I sat in that chair, looking at grotesque image of mutilated body with Slaanesh sigil engraved into woman's forehead for few minutes. Can't even remember what was going in my head. Drifted away into astral space to immediately be prodded by dark presence. A very malicious, dark presence. Someone or something was watching me from shadows of immaterium. As I immediately turned my point of consciousness toward it, shadow run away,



dispelling any traces. I knew energetic “smell” of that kind, feeling the very inclination of the intent. Curiosity. Morbid curiosity.

For those two, it looked like I sprung up from chair like a puppet on a string, which alarmed them immediately. It threw them out of character. For me, this one second in real world seemed like few minute in my mind, trying to latch onto any kind of traces of this psyker or whatever it was.

I used my PDA to send message to Maroo, to emergency call Janna and Fred, meet me in the office, effective immediately. I ordered mechanicus to stay alert and perform any frequency sweep they could in this situation without walking out of room. I also turned off images for time being. They exchanged binary for few seconds and went on with my order.

Of course, they never had close encounter with psykers, other then on dataslates. I tried to be as calm as grave, while Magos used his gizmos to sweep room in searching of warp energies in room around.

It was just 7 minutes until my squad assembled, but it felt like whole eternity. Olsmo, Mastaf, Maroo, Kimbly, Theodolite and Janna. Once they sat comfortably, gazing at what Techpriests were doing, I brought up holovid just for few seconds to have closer look. Canoness was thrown in disgust and rage while two other in severe agony. Janna got up, walking aimlessly around deep in her thoughts. Her aura overflow with worry. I never got to discuss her feeling but asked her if she knew what those symbols are. She said she did not, but in a very specific way giving me impression that she lied on purpose. In her current state it would even come as believable. Rest of them were both curious and vividly frightened to know it became so serious.

We waited until Lily calmed down to further discuss what we just saw. Everyone was already in the loop about sacrificial rites done, but no one yet saw the visuals. Abrax stated that only him, Kaifas and two other servitors saw what was rotting in governor's attic.

I ordered complete shutdown of the area, sealing off any evidence. Canoness was silent as others acknowledged. Of course, they wanted to know why what they seen was so . . . precarious, to go to such lengths. Janna just looked at me with half raging, half desperate eyes. Her composure remained but auric field was opened like a a book. I could feel she knew about what we saw, feeling restlessness in desperate attempt to hold herself back from haranguing us. My guess was, that she learned something from Synthia.

To calm company down . . . yeah . . . I told them someone attempted a psychic attack on me and those rituals had a lot to do with dark energies this psyker used. Ordered to search for every bit of evidence about any other such instance. New or historical. Maroo had to stop fooling around and begin to use military to search for any evidence, pursuing human traffic in subsector with extreme prejudice as priority no.1. It was very sudden for him. He continuously remarked about poor condition of planet and tried to tackle corporations but what he saw was above his competence.

It was obvious that time of precise excising this rot was long gone. It now had to be destroyed with fire. Preferably before inquisition arrived. Janna was even more surprised to hear that fleet is on the arrival in few weeks. No one ever communicated this to her. When they heard we argued so casually about inquisition, all looked like they flipped inside, imagining most disastrous



scenarios they heard all their lives. Just speaking name “inquisition” struck dread into hearts.

But they didn't understand how serious was this situation. Not even canoness did. I told them that war is already under way. This stunt we had few weeks before was just a beginning. Not even a beginning . . . just a distraction for something.

We had to drop any popular pretense . . . get physical with corporations if they resist, drop any “legal” proceedings. Now . . . I really was the law who tried to remain in power. Things had to be done. Of course, it meant marshal law implementation which was . . . against anything we tried to achieve. It hurt to even take it into possibility. But there we were – our economy would collapse as wealthy tried to escape hell they created, while inquisition burned to cinders whatever was left. I could not root out exterminatus out of picture. Especially if Inquisition was somewhat inclined to help previous governing body, just to cover tracks.

Shit got serious even more, even faster. That much was obvious. My men wanted to, no... demanded to know what was going on. I heard Janna's voice, saying to not tell them, because it . . . well, you know yourself best what happens to people meddling in heresy. But I felt it would do more good . . . so I did, but only in part, stating this sign was sigil of a warp entity, and we had chaos cult infestation on the planet. They heard about it in stories and preaches but could never imagine coming to face to face with such thing. Maroo almost broke down. It was first time I saw Kimbly pale. Abrax was clearly out of loop, but pricked his bionic appendages like he have heard about archeotech. Magos seemed to know what it all meant and was afraid of corruption. The primal fear against powers beyond his command and imagination.

I held them almost at gunpoint and demanded oath of secrecy. Everyone without exception had to comply. We had to keep it contained no matter what. And we had to move immediately. I ordered Maroo to begin populus mobilization and conscription. Mastaf was to take our guys, heavy equipment and secure anything corresponding to Blacklight holdings within capital. Frederick would call Huges and have him ready air support, inform other branches of the incoming civil war situation and gather fleet.

They had objections. Especially Magos. He tried to convince me of not making a hasty decision about threat we weren't sure existed. I disbanded meeting but told Janna and Frederick to stay. We still had a lot to discuss. Consultant's room became rowdy again when it seemed like it's past time of giving us some quiet. Better for us, of course.

We waited a minute after door closed to bring up matter of chaos sigil. This time Janna was more talkative. I asked if she got any knowledge from Synthia. She did. In fact she described step by step her “interrogation”. And boy, oh boy, it sounded very inquisition like. She was considered traitor to the Emperor. Simple confessions were not enough. She tried to “pick her apart” to know what rotten wretchedness consumed her mind. Since there was no recording to validate what she told us, it had to be taken on face value.

Synthia knew about facility beneath communication center since forever. She willingly supplied initiate sisters to mind control center as per agreement with SoS. Those sisters would serve as drone bodyguards of ecclesiarchy's inner



members, after which they returned to service with memory wiped. Apparently scientists found safe way to erase memories. They also had cloning technology, obviously, which made them very dangerous adversary. They could substitute any person as long as they were at least 95% meat. Apparently VATS chamber, or maybe Edmund, could replicate any DNA sample. Even dead one . . .

I asked if there was any facility at monastery which served this purpose. Canoness vehemently rejected such notion and swore she turned it upside down in search for foul stench. Allegedly, Synthia told her she knew that major population was not so lucky and were used in dark rituals. . . . She asked for number . . . I don't know if it's true, but it went as high as 11 million people sold on black market each year. Beximia, biggest harbor city on the planet, just short stretch from Regna hydroponics, had extensive underground facilities and biggest smuggling operations in subsector. Synthia said that no one ever checked marine freight manifestos due to corruption in official administration ranks.

I asked if Synthia showed any multiple personality disorder. Janna acknowledged that she had three alters surfacing through during interrogation, but in the end it was her who performed all those acts.

Brainwashed sororitas had their neurological tissues precisely removed and regrown to maintain full capabilities before returning to official duty. Of course, the bodyguards were used in many ways. Mostly as power projection. Or sex dolls. According to Synthia, some of her sisters were used in this way.

I had to bring up icons of sin. Synthia did not say anything about this . . . cult, even . . . under pressure. She said she did not know any details of operations or whereabouts after sisters were shipped off world in one of those fancy ships up till they returned in stasis.

And again I asked her about it. She was the canoness. She should know about it. And I think she begun to suspect me as part of this conspiracy. Frederick was very impatient and inquisitive with his questions, to finally know what is it all about. With no reason to hold back, we told him about what those symbols meant. As you can imagine, he wasn't thrilled to know something foul as Chaos God really existed.

Since we disclosed a lot of inappropriate information already, I relayed to them what happened at tavern and then about psychic intrusion. We sat for a while in silence. Chatter inside council room somewhat lifted our suspense. And boy, it was tense. Janna couldn't wait to put her fist up someone's ... eeeeeeeee ... face.

Dead silence broke knock on the door. Maid brought in snacks, Maroo asked if they were needed in any way and handed me over a letter from Percival Huges.

When we were left alone again, I opened and read it. In welter of mundane damage and situation reports, there was nothing worth of attention. I knew it was important though. He would not make a letter with sigil out of it. As Frederick tried to help me to decipher it, Janna sat on sofa. Still. Crossing her arms, looking at her crossed legs in complete reverie.

Then I got prodded again by psychic presence. Yet this time, I remained neutral, not reacting, but stilling my aetheric flow as not to alert invader, trying to catch it off guard. I might have looked at letter in front of me, but my mind was focused outside, to the point of oblivion. Up to my surprise, presence did not try to invade me. It was invading Janna. I immediately looked at her and Frederick as



well, suspecting something happened on other plane. I told him to keep quiet and not react to her nose bleeding. He was supposed to be reading the letter. Whoever, whatever it was, had powerful firewall around itself. I went around it to look for the source, without knowing what did it do with Janna. Since it had powerful shell around it, breaking through would surely alert presence. I was nearing destination when that something noticed me riding its own thought patterns, tracing source of this presence to orbit around Mara. I tried to get a better look at its position, search for astral waypoints on the other side, when it finally noticed me.

After that, invader vanished cutting off any connection. When canoness begun to collapse, Frederick yelled out of lungs for Kaifas, trying to sit her up. In few seconds everyone battered through door in great uproar. I told Kaifas about another psychic intrusion as he tried to help her.

Maroo was shocked listening to it. Bad things layered one after another. Problems begun to mount up exponentially. I told Frederick to not to disclose what we discussed with Janna.

Pretty sure sure many felt overburdened, but I could not show weakness, putting up stone face no matter what. Everyone barging through asked what happened one after another. Frederick swiftly managed situation, sifting people and closing the door. Theories, speculations and gossip loud enough to hear it though door filled night's aura.

I was perfectly fine, but canoness bled through nose and mouth. Something invaded her mind. According to Kaifas she had her brain barriers torn in few places. Damage then shifted towards nasal cavity, bursting multiple blood vessels. It was nothing serious in his estimate, but ruptured tissues had to be healed immediately. With his expertise he could mend her up in a matter of week. We called Leo and Kira to inform about situation. They immediately run into office.

Two sisters wanted to transport her to monastery, but Kaifas was very opposing. Something psychic wanted to kill her. We could not risk it again. If not for my detection of this intrusion, she would be dead already. We had her moved to my private med bay.

I immediately contacted Huges, ordered him to move any and every available battle ready ships to this point in orbit and put whole command on red alert status. He was to search for any trace of voidcraft or warp disturbances. I also told him to come tomorrow for briefing into the situation.

People in room spoke out of their minds. Terrified of prospect of psychic killer. Especially when they never had any contact with psykers or just sporadic navigators. I felt they were blaming me, this could not be contained. Rumors and speculation spread like plague. By midnight, whole capital spire knew about what happened to Janna. Maroo went to extreme measures to ensure it never got out of hand.

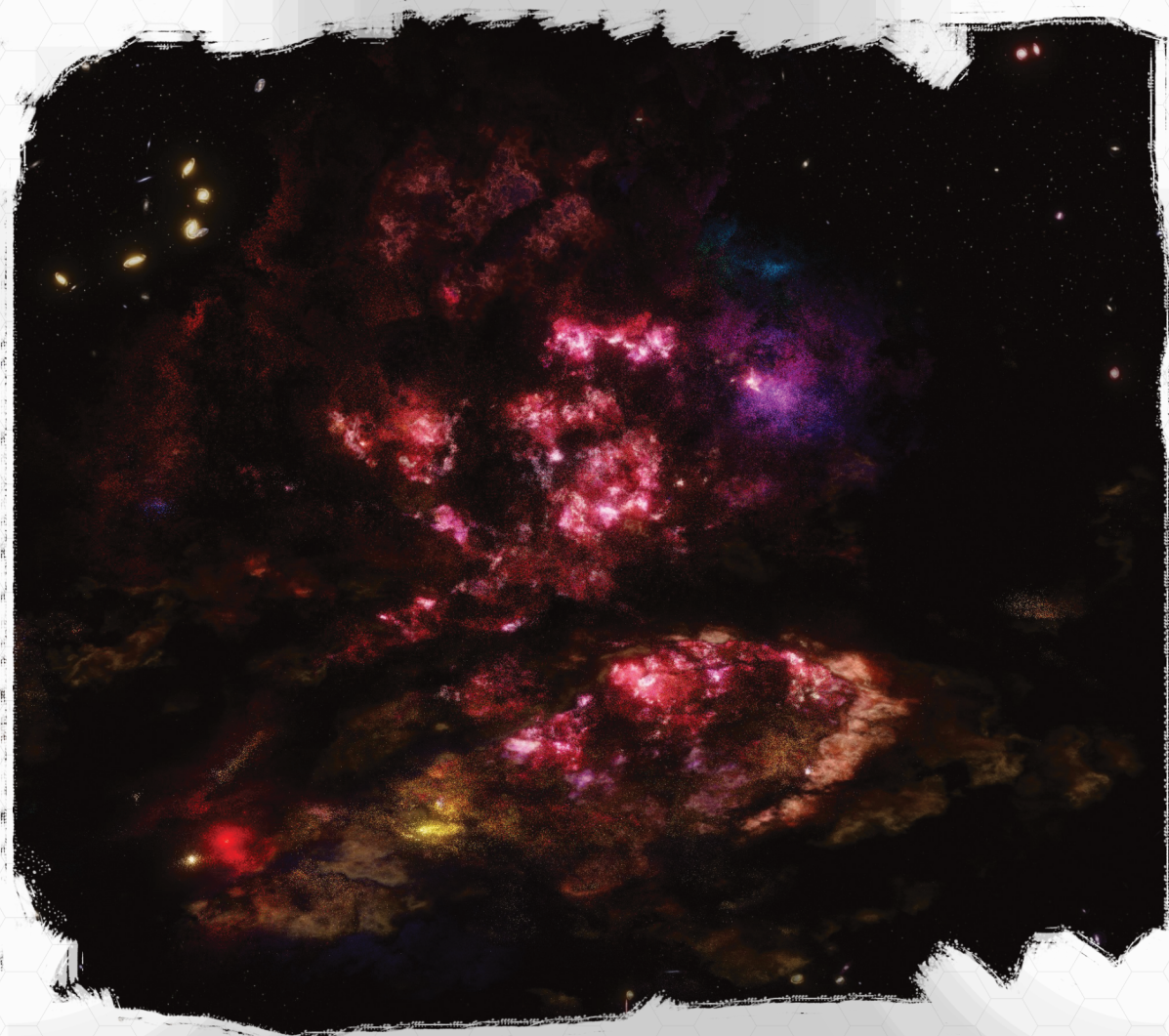
Krietlig and de Estana had a sudden change of heart about participation in advisory body, thinking they were easy targets for this unknown force. They were allowed to stay in guest rooms, which alleviated their anxiety.

I disbanded this meeting and sent everyone home, telling Maroo And Frederick to get some rest. Everyone was out. Not even servitor or servo skull remained in upper floors. Eerily quiet and deserted.

As room was vacated, I sat at office desk, upon main throne and begun to



scribe official orders for all regiments, spending all night filling stack of papers with plans and drafts. It was for me most important to coordinate all military forces inside system in at least somewhat coherent manner, instead of usual throwing ideas on the wall in hope it sticks. There was no time for reminiscing past. Work consumed me. Time flew effortlessly until sun had risen again. Worries tired me. Perhaps even more than usual battle fatigue, making me fight with my own thoughts.



— Arrival Day [74_] — Pursuit day [60_] — Day of reign [28_] —

In the morning, first one to knock on the door was Huges. He had other officers with him, but entered office only with Kwintet. We discussed important point without delay. I explained to them what our techpriests have uncovered, situation about SoS, Blacklight and even told them about chaos cult lurking somewhere . . . there. New admiral was clearly upset to hear what wretchedness has nested right inside his precious home. Huges on the other hand kept straight face. I asked him if he ever heard about it, or has any experience. He confessed to me that he saw this symbol few times when, together with Frederick, were soldier trainees, or experiment specimen, at Akeno facility. He said one of “visitors” had a scar in this shape. I was VEEERY curious how come Frederick does not remember anything. Commissar told me that mind wiping technology wasn't perfect. Some of them had their memories come back after years. He recollected those only a year ago and now remembered almost everything which happened there. Before he would progress, I called over Frederick and Kaifas. We shut ourselves in office and I made sure that consultant's room was locked out as well, to ensure nobody eavesdropped. Everybody knew this meeting would be utmost secretive.

Percival was very diligent in his descriptions of time they spent with other “volunteers” at Akeno. Most of time, they would be training in murderous and hideous confines of previous penal colony. Many times they were beaten to death by coordinators for being too weak or send off to experiment chambers. Some procedures consisted of being locked up with others until near death. Sometimes, soldiers would turn on each other to cannibalize brothers or face starvation. He heard that only last remaining survivor would be released and taken to more rigorous projects.

Some boys were locked up with dead bodies and had to eat corpses for sustenance. Quarter of soldiers were given some concoctions to drink, while another quarter would be injected with chems. Almost every month, special trainer came to teach them new tactics or tricks. Ever six solar months came a very special visitor, who would gauge progress and choose few of people who excelled at tasks, to be transferred to other places. He allegedly saw that this visitor had chaos star symbol tattooed below his left ear, but never saw Slaanesh sigil.

We talked about it for half an hour, asking various questions which could help me in investigation. Kaifas had some insights to what procedures might have been used but all of it were just guesses. Olsmo had some memories open, but as Huges talked further, he realized how thoroughly they were erased. And became bitter towards his fellow for keeping it secret for so long.

Huges thought that no one would believe him what really transpired inside those black sites. He also never suspected that they might have been part of a greater plot. After all, during Amschel's reign, Imperial power has gone down the drain anyway . . .

When we finished this part, Kwintet reported about order I gave last night. He sent almost 15 ships able for rapid response, but they found nothing. Auspexes detected no abnormal flow of warp.



I asked Kaifas if he had any ideas about this situation. He very much refuted. Only after I reminded him how deep he was connected to this madness, he started to speak.

Confessed that he somewhat knew about what Reitziger was doing, saying that knowledge about how to grow human clones was held very closely guarded secret of noosphere at forgeworld. According to Magos, only fabricator had access to such advanced knowledge but it was incomplete due to main cogitator matrix malfunction over 300 years ago. Because of this, VATS grown humans could not be achieved locally, which hampered easy creation servitors of any kind. Coincidentally, complementary knowledge was provided to Kaifas in archeotech dataslates offered by SoS, which in turn skyrocketed his career, making him a Magos. It was barely in late 958, right at the time, when Akeno black site was in operation.

Few years later he learned that archeotech knowledge was not ancient but created very lately. Gift of dataslates, which now lies deep within manufactorum, allowing growing human clones is in fact a heresy. Knowledge vaults consist of everything considering physical nature of flesh but have nothing about the most sacred part of its machine spirit.

He proceeded to explain how Edmund seemed to have gotten a help from the same source which provided him those methods. He was very explicit, and very jealous, how Edmund managed to create artificial wombs, allowing artificial birth of artificial people, with genuine souls. It was Reitziger's most guarded secret and point of dispute for every overlord within organization. Everyone desired perfect dolls. Except for me and Magos, no one ever could tell they lacked something. Because of how well they turned out, they were too sentient to be mere clones, so Edmund created new words for them. Bioroids. Near perfect artificial people.

Although never knowing why were those experiments happening, he was aware there was more to it than just a doll factory. He was aware that whoever devised this understanding had to know about human race more than Mechanicus. More than Archmagos Biologis. We received lecture about Imperium's knowledge how to make genetically enhanced specimens, but could never grow a perfect human artificially. As far as he was concerned, only Emperor managed to complete such outstanding task. Technology assisted birth was very wide spread, but never creation of life in a tube, from start to finish.

Everything changed when first bioroid has been "born". That's the word he used, "birth". Due to phenomenal amount of demand for it, Von Rosette put all resources behind him to make sure their operations run all day, all night. It worried Kaifas, as his predictions did not compute with return on the investment. Worse, Reitziger was not even in slightest augmented with any amount divine blessings of the Omnissiah, yet overflowed in capabilities of all sciences, which even fabricator general couldn't equal. He begun to dig, becoming even more entranced inside inner circle to get to the bottom of this, but with no result.

Only after I asked him to help me with all the books thing, he understood dataslate given to him was . . . false. He returned to Lokinyth forgeworld and visited noosphere vault of knowledge to check upon and cross reference content with the archeotech data slates he "offered". And . . . they were gone. He tried to confront Fabricator with this manner but she was . . . He found her dead inside private laboratory. According to his testimony, it looked exactly like what



happened to Janna. With psychic infused brain hemorrhage.

He suspected that recent troubles with production was due to still unresolved question of leadership inside priesthood. There were three candidates for position, but Kaifas declined, leaving only two rivals.

Most importantly however, Fabricator KIT-4E was in close contact with techpriests inside St Dominica's monastery. He managed to secure a correspondence between them, warning about Synthia's treachery of her own sisters. Communication had warning about unseen forces and attachment of icon of Chaos Star. Kitlana asked for permission to dive into archives for ancient knowledge, urging to research it in most immediate manner.

Sooooo . . . As soon as he noticed appropriate organization about fabricator's fate, he rushed to research it, without telling anyone what he was up to, in total secrecy, even cutting himself out from gestalt noosphere field for this time.

Forgeworld has a section of vaults which was closed with inquisitorial seal and labeled forbidden knowledge so long ago, very few entries still list them in any logs, being passed from fabricator to fabricator. It stood like that for almost 5000 years, unopened. Said he had feelings of dread and excitement despite having outer brain cortex wired to cogitators, disconnected during this task. In the end, he managed to break ancient seal by omitting usual rights and canticles.

He admitted that he did not adhere to usual conduct and rituals of Mechanicus and many times he would cut it out entirely, which was amazing time saving process. Techpriesthood didn't understand their cant in first place. It was Edmund who gave him idea about why those practices and rites have been put in place in first place. He summarized it as passing self-debug and restoration protocol commands to cogitators unit, in language they couldn't decipher.

Allegedly, opening a vault would take whole procession lasting for two days. He managed break off seals and push a button in five minutes. He had little time, as cardinal sin of extreme trespassing would be considered a sacrilege profanity.

Inside, there were innumerable tomes and ceiling high stacks of library shelves filled with most amazing information, each behind glass doors, stretching for half a mile. He saw many uncanny devices and idols hidden behind reinforced glass, held in stasis. Every cell needed inquisitorial authentication codes to unlock, so they were out of reach. In center of the room however two persons sat in old armchairs in front of access terminal. After cautious sneaking, as much as a techpriest could really do, he came closer only to see mummified skeletons of sisters dialoguing with a chanting book at their laps. Since he did not have time for proper ceremonies, he did not disturb the dead and reached out to the commanding console. Access was opened, as sisters never truly locked it away. Unfortunately, interface was different from what Adeptus Mechanicus were using and he had to go through database via old fashioned means of perusing files via holoboard. Power would flicker and console would shut down multiple times. Some of keys were not functioning already, but he stopped urge to repair panel in awareness it might have give him away or trigger some kind of alarm.

He searched for entries of xeno infographics or ancient cults of Imperium but this ... was obviously not working, but he didn't know what to search for. He managed to input search prompt for black star, which had multiple results but



most of them were concentrated in written tome, under serial number I don't remember, but managed to trace position of that tome. It was missing from its place behind glass display. It forced him to track another, hoping to be of any use. Then, there was issue of alarm and possible protective means of the vault. Before breaking any seal, he had to make sure he exhausted every possibility and begun to search for any place sisters might have used. Even them had to have a restroom or a bed in this place. He found their little home via door under staircase to upper level balconies. It was surely forgotten. One of sisters died on the bed, mummified in filth. There was a stack of books beside collapsed bed. He obviously took a look at them.

Most of books were holy scriptures and reminiscences of battles fought during time of great expanse. There even was a tome of Mara, the Canoness of the Bloody Rose who reclaimed this part of space for Imperium. Some scriptures about xeno races and even tome about blasphemous rituals of early humans, who worshiped golden idols and forest spirits. On barely holding up side table, laid *Heretica Excomunica*, book about how to deal with witchcraft and psychic scourge spirits.

Most important was however diaries of Inquisitor Hulak ab Ka'el Mador, in which was written how he resolved his fight against unholy forces of xenos plaguing world of M-A-R/O18 in sector Haephestus, which intrigued Kaifas since there is no such world in any records. In there, he would provide insight into enemy tactics and modes of operation as well as sacrifices needed to sustain materialization of demons in real world. It consisted of chants enemy used and rituals needed to incur warp energies. Apparently chaos star icon was engraved in first pages, with segment warning reader about dangers of this knowledge. You know techpriests – dangers, shmegenrs.

He continued searching for other books where this icon was explained. Before forcing open any lock, he decided to read and catalog every tome laying free. During this process, he found in tome of Mara's crusade, description of happenings during war of M37.114 on planet M-A-R/O18. After just few pages, he lost himself in time, forgetting about trespassing. Hunger of knowledge was all he could feel at that time, which led him to search other places for possible entries. There was a very special mini vault in room of sister superior. Altar to holy God Emperor decorated in gold seal of inquisition and chantry. Behind, or in front, a very big safety doors. Upon it, inquisitorial seals and purity rights. Two golden cherubs holding a spear engraved into doors. Each one had an opening in their mouths for authentication code slate. He noticed one of them already had such slate inserted. Deciding to search for another, he took this one out to serve as template and used his scanning device to find complementary objects. Roamed all rooms but nothing showed up on scanners. The only place he did not search . . . were dead bodies. And whatd'ia know. . . he found it . . . in the main vault room between two dead sisters . . . underneath armor plate of what remained of sister superior. This time, sisters received proper prayers and chants to send off their spirits to the light of the Emperor before reaching for device.

He then rushed to open those doors. Unlocking mechanism worked, but opening mechanism failed, so he had to pry it with his mechandrite tools. Behind heavy door was only just one book.



A: He told us that he understood unholy nature of this tome and decided it nevertheless.

A: I don't know if he did. We never seen an footage of his actions. For others, it sounded like severe exaggeration, but I knew he was telling the truth.

A: Ye . . . forbidding Magos to study is as effective as reasoning with Khorne berserkers.

A: We did it later anyway.

He knew it was heretical. He knew it was blasphemous. He knew it was sacrilege to life. He needed to know what this icon represented exactly. As soon as Kaifas touched it, strange vibrations pulsated though his dendrites, feeling a surge of energy in his mechanical body. He flipped one page, then second and then third. He described pages of some kind of skin, written with black blood, almost engraved upon parchment. Each sheet filled with diagrams and symbols he could not decipher but filled his mind with terror, even only looking at it. Apparently, even though not being a psyker, he felt a big, black, dark presence looking at him from wall behind him. Performing debug and re-initializing system of his cogitators didn't help.

Despite having his emotion compartment disconnected, something filled him with primal fear, scared for life. Described it as “Warp starring down on me”. He immediately closed everything shut, returned keys and run away from vault, making sure to put back every seal back, in great haste. With a bit of luck no one would notice. After that, Kaifas sent contact request to Kitlana but she was sent out to help hospitalers on one of ships to Rotuna II and not available for direct confrontation.

I assured him we would keep this a secret, explaining to everyone just how serious was this crime. Frederick had objections, yet incapable to put it clearly in words, circling around topic. Hard to tell if he even believed in it.

Huges was deep in thinking and Russel . . . well . . . let's just say he was . . . white pale at this point. Being captain of ship traveling through warp made him listen to many fantastic stories, but never imagined they could even be real. Especially about inquisition's vault holding such . . . monstrosities. He started to believe all the gossip and madman stories he heard from guardsmen all those years.

I asked Kaifas if he had pictures of those first pages. He did have memory banks. Admiral had to be reminded to keep it all for himself. In form of short break, I also handed him stack of orders from my desk, consisting of fleet deployments, mainly to fight Orks and make sure they not build momentum. He had order to stay at High Command and not leave Elkor until further notice. Kwintet excused himself, being sure he shouldn't know that much after all. Understandably.

Commissars and techpriest stayed in my office as I went to visit apothecarium. Four hospitalers and whole celestial squad were already on their feet, helping Janna recover. She was a tough cookie.

Just like Kaifas said, damage to her tissues wasn't great. She could normally



function, somehow, but full recovery would take 8 days. We had a nice little chat, after I asked if she was up for some more nonsense, because there was a lot to discuss.

Militarum needed their help to combat what was coming and whole order needed to pull resources against this. She was very blatant to say I had no power to command order, as well as having no reason to comply. Pushing further or pleading got me nowhere.

Instead, I thought about someone else, who was in command over order. We had Krietlig in guest rooms after all. Paying him a visit was very . . . disturbing. He became paranoid. He was convinced that this attack was against him, not Janna and he needed better protection. So happened that only people capable of helping him were stranded on giant freighters and warships. And there was me of course. He constantly nagged me about a protection. Because . . . He was "TOO DAMN IMPORTANT"!

Imagine why nobody liked him. Especially not me. But . . . He could get his psyker bodyguard if he lent me authority over Sororitas to combat this dark presence. It was about their fighting capacity and military prowess, not politics nor power grab. At first, he shouted me out of room for proposing such foolishness, but as soon as I grabbed door handle, he run to me, pleading to stay and see his reason. We made deal concerning his bodyguards and I even promised to be of protection to him during public events.

We wrote an edict granting me military command over Order Of Laurel Crown for next three solar years. More then enough. I had written letter of extreme importance to Collegia Telepathica at Haephestus, requesting psychic bodyguard for cardinal. We stamped it with governor's, Sororitas, Ecclesiarchy and most notably Inquisitorial seals, with Janna's signature on it. She wasn't all that skeptical now and saw it as a good precaution to have such bodyguard to protect revered cardinal. It had to have Maroo signature, but that would have to wait till he showed up later.

Now, that ecclesiarchy was largely off my back, we could return to important matters. While at office, I noticed I forgot to sign order documents. Frederick told me that it was not important, but wanted to see my plans anyway. Together with Huges and Kaifas looked through stacks of papers and had few things to add. Kaifas helped us with drafting plans for fleet combat. My main concern were Orks. First and foremost, I suspected that cult will go into hibernation mode, making me divide fleet to fight greenskins. Our main objective remained to take over food supply chains and revert control over them to planetary administration. After we dealt with Mara, we would focus on other agri worlds.

Magos provided all tonnage and weaponry capacity calculations needed. My intuition agreed with those. His draft did not however took into consideration my own abilities. They saw me on the front line of Riktus system, but I told them how easy Orks are to fight. If we threw enough people and equipment, not even dumbasses from central defense bunker could screw it up. With chaos cult however, situation was different. I was the only one with experience who knew how to deal with those things.

And there . . . there was a biiiiiig question . . . of how in the Emperor's blazing name did I know all of that . . . Frederick was very restless seeing how I



knew about all those things and could counteract it, not being even slightly fazed about all . . . chaosy shit they learnt about just last night, and from no other than me . . . Kaifas well, Kaifas wanted to know how did I know what that book was in the first place. How would I know how to fight warp entities and so on.

Well . . . As you can imagine I didn't have a good lie prepared, so I told them I was inquisitorial acolyte on a mission . . . yeah . . . They demanded proof of my identity, but I insisted that my knowledge should be proof in itself. I gave them impression inquisitors rarely worked in the open. They asked me about the alleged fleet that was coming, but I said I know nothing about it and that was not my inquisitor. It . . . was a bad lie. They didn't buy it.

A: It's . . . not entirely lie. I was a part of inquisition before. I do what I must do, to make sure I can . . . do my job.

A: Well . . . it was from time to time. At least once per century. I managed to learn conduct of all ordos. With their written and not spoken rules. It also helps me getting in the loop of the more important things happening all over galaxy.

A: Considering places I end up in, the inquisition in present in 20% of those cases, so its just easier to . . . blend.

A: Sure, its hard to be persuasive towards a puritan, but there are some radicals who know how to make use of borrowed strength. Especially my strength.

A: If you would only see what those REALLY extreme dickheads do to their people.

A: Like daemonhosts?

A: Maybe you didn't, but I've seen enough of madness in this world. Path to hell is cobbled with good intentions. And then reality knocks you down . . .

It put our conversation at stop and made them revert to silence. I tried to eat in peace, without showing how it threw me out of balance. Lying so many times about myself would surely lead to such situation in the end. Distrust built up within their auras. Atmosphere became . . . electric.

In addition, I was tired. Everything happened so quickly, without warning, inconspicuous. There were so many unknowns and time was running out. I wanted to resolve this before black ships arrive. It was impossible to make up lost production in such short time but at least we had to try bringing it back to full capacity. With visible distance, our planning paced like a slug.

Kaifas arranged servo scribe for my personal use. Then, it would just be in need of my signature. It sped up process significantly. I delegated Olsmo to be overall commander of ground planetary forces, while Huges was to be overall aerial and fleet commander of planetary defense systems. We had high command notified. Thanks to that, there was no need to fill orders myself.

Maroo reported for duty around 11 AM. Frederick briefed him about orders and overall plan. At this stage council room begun to fill up with stack of papers containing orders for all regiments and PDF across whole subsector. He would



issue those orders from central command.

Meantime, we could speak about increasing our military capability. Whatever we had, was just enough to maintain order on planet. We could move out 75% of troops after we cleansed cultist to help in other systems. Our trump card was opportunity to conscript almost 70 000 000 battle capable men. Waiting for their training became huge downside.

Time we didn't have. Another option was to incorporate PDF and "rebel cells" into army to rise new, fresh defense force, which would cut this time in half and bring around five million new guardsmen. Still, the most problematic was food shortage.

Some units begun their advance this morning but most, who were just gathering battle formations, would be ready in full in a week. And that's only on planet Mara. We had little to no indication how large reserves did Blacklight hold in other star systems.

I asked Kaifas if Mechanicus were inclined to help, but he was not in capacity to lend help of the whole organization. I would have to befriend whoever would become next Fabricator General and prepare a sizable resource pool as tribute.

Just as we spoke, Frederick received from command reports of fire skirmishes inside Elkor. It begun. Civil war started. We had statements ready and revised to be issued to the public but I was afraid that BL's infiltration of public opinion was more than capable of spinning things around.

I called over Marcus to discuss next commercial phase of our plan, delicately suggesting him that as governor's commercial advisor, he had the duty to use his influence and wealth to help with our efforts. He wasn't negative about it, but concerned about how it would be used, insisting he did not want to back up any fighting or be connected to weapon smuggle. I could work with that.

We had a different approach. Army would liberate from hands of our opponents factories, farms and goods production centers, which he would take over, already having expertise in commerce. He was allowed to keep ownership of those places under strict rule of making sure government was the only beneficiary of those plants. We wanted, most of all, to make sure people do not starve during war. With a Magos present we had quite the advantage in planning supply routes. Kaifas declared that local branch of Mechanicus will provide appropriate techpriests to deal with factory repairs or overhauls, although it might take few days to weeks. Or, as I knew how Imperium works, years. I decided to inform de Estana about our war plans so he could prepare and anticipate where to put his resources.

It was nearing dinner time so we postponed work for a time. All documents were then moved to central command, council room opened for advisory body.

I visited apothecarium to ask Janna for her presence to finally discuss what Kaifas presented us. After proposing to meet in my room, I had my command squad ready and made sure no one would bother us on the way. Janna insisted that her palatines must be read into situation, so we called Sister Superior Leonida and Sera accompany us. Canoness had to be carefully transported and sat into armchair. Sisters made a great fuss about her health. They chanted prayers for her health almost all day long. We had to leave choir outside doors.

Pfffffffffff . . . We started by bringing new members up to speed. I also



showed parchment deal we signed with Krietlig about commanding Sororitas for a specific amount of time. Imagine her disappointment and outrage. Nevertheless, she acknowledged and declared to abide by contract we made.

With the easy stuff out of the way, I had Kaifas bring up cult rite scenes up on holoivid to discuss it further. I made sure not to disclose his excursion to vault.

Sisters were visibly shocked. More than they should be. I estimated they had some memories or feeling surface through. Maybe. But to add spice to the situation, Sera recognized one of the females – sister Magdalene from order hospitalers. She was sent to help workers at Lokinyth III, to cure a nasty disease decimating population in one of living hives, just three months ago. Apparently they were friends and kept in touch until she stopped getting any response, only 21 days after departure. She never questioned it, assuming her harsh assignment must have prevented it in a way. It was very . . . unnerving, indeed. They would investigate what happened there, later.

Before bringing up what happened at broadcasting center, Janna asked me, very decisively, not to mention things underground. With introductions behind us, we moved to the fun part. For starters, Kaifas decided it was best to start with easiest topics when he mentioned what happened at de Estana mansion, Ghost vehemently denied any kind of temple being in operation in whole sector. It was first time he ever heard about such thing. Sisters seconded his statement. Ghost told us very straightforward, that he cannot tell us where is Vindicare temple, but there was nothing like this in whole sector, even movement of the assassin was very . . . uncanny and fluent. We assumed it was few spoiled apples working against us in intelligence division, but he suspected a rouge operator.

Once we had, almost, everything cleared up, we finally focused to problem of the cults. I explained how Blacklight, Crimson Raiders and Society of Sovereign were multiple branches of the same organization and it was our top priority to sniff out and put down those psychos before they could damage our worlds.

Sisters, being sisters, vowed to purge all heretics out of existence. You can imagine how ferocious was their anger. As temporary commander of the order, I gave them freedom of movement as well as sanctioned all that was "necessary" to deal with this pestilence. Governor would provide logistic backup and reinforcements when new regiments were ready. I told them to focus on search for Reitziger and von Rosette, delegating Ghost to be at canoness' disposition and transferred him under temporary command of the order. There was a need for few squads of Sororitas to bolster ranks of guardsmen in biggest cities, mainly for morale purpose.

After that, we went over plans for planetary warfare once again. Janna gave us few hints about raising regiments and declared to lend some of sister famulous to help us in recruiting process.

The problem was, still, equipment. We knew tithe will not be covered already and we knew forgeworld was lagging behind in production for whole sector. Raw materials production was severely impacted. Mining worlds did not have enough manpower to resume full capacity. Now, it was very obvious, how our subsector's capabilities were sabotaged long before this started. For sisters it was just obvious we should sent more people to mines, but then, there was not enough food to upkeep workers. Until we had supplies covered, miners would just die out of starvation in few days. We knew we had to focus on planet first. Even



as Ork warband attacked sector. Sure, it was Eta Jay subsector who has been attacked, but Mara was nonetheless, the perceived power house in sector.

I proposed to call Hephaestus for backup against cults, but they all agreed that it was best to keep our problem inside subsystem without disturbing possible commercial lines with outside. Mara had little capabilities of producing heavy machinery or heavy weapons. According to Kaifas, local factories could produce large quantities of slug and shell weaponry, but not las weapons. Any war machine could be repaired only in three places on planet. Those were logistic bases of Astra Militarum situated along pancontinental railroad system. Elkor was one of those.

Frederick reminded that this compound is still Blacklight controlled, very fortified and heavily guarded with dozens of Flugger tanks, a locally produced, dirt cheap version of Leman Russ. Still, it was mobile armor with big guns. Our weaponry remained scattered around our own emplacements. Well . . . that gave me my first target.

I then asked about all of the non standard imperial weaponry Mara was capable of producing. Frederick knew about seven plants which produced three types of vehicles used for PDF. Flugger was a cheap tank. Konika was a typical armored transport. Brutus was a towed artillery piece. Until now, there was no need for any large scale production. Huges maintained that aerial forces consisted of only 100 Valkyrie craft stationed around planet. High command had 46 at its disposal. Those hundreds of other craft we saw there were locally produced jet fighters, suitable for only atmospheric flight.

Kaifas had pulled up blueprints of those machines. He was the Magos of local branch after all, with access to everything we needed.

Flugger was half the size of Russ and run on synthetic biofuel with 90mm cannon and coaxial weapon. Nothing special. Konika . . . well . . . not much more than armored launchbox. Brutus however was just what we needed. It was a whooping 12 inch cannon with high-explosive round of firing range of 27 miles. Perfect against fighting Orks. Huge shrapnel blast, cheap to produce, easy to use, easy to store, zero upkeep needed and most of all, resources to produce it were available on planet itself. Produceable even from scrap at junkyards. Even canoness was impressed by that gun. We decided to focus our production on this piece. We also needed a lot of transports. Konika was design from 37th millennium. We had access to Taurox transport, but we would have to build manufacturing plant first. Frederick was adamant that for our planetary civil war purpose, Konika was enough, being mechanically foolproof design with zero to little maintenance needed.

Our forces were scarce, but we had military advantage. We had sororitas and ... me. The only problem was food resources and we would achieve ultimate goal of this campaign. After clearing out planet we could focus on supplying war effort against Orks.

As soon as we finished, I sent commissars on duty. My officers were sent to armory to prepare for sortie this evening on repair depo. Janna was taken back to apothecarium. But . . . I needed to speak with Kaifas alone.

We waited until absolutely sure nobody listened. This case, of what he saw, was probably the most important clue to what was happening at large. He needed to show me images in his data banks. We started by discussing very cover.



Something like winged serpent swallowing its own, long tail engraved in what looked like Eldar souls stone crystal. Unlike normal books, this one had its pages bonded on two rings. Cover clearly crafted of black wraithbone.

It was . . . Fuck . . . a Haemunculi black grimoire. There were only few pages recorded but I noticed at once manner in which black speech was written. It's . . . unmistakable. Eldar lexicon twisted to be of use to black arts.

A: So, you never saw one. Aren't you supposed to be ordo xenos?

A: Yes, I can. But it's impossible to accurately describe what it is. You need to understand lexicon first, only then you can see how it was . . . adjusted.

1st page had ouroboros diagram. It was . . . aaaaaaa . . . homunculus in form of serpent eating its own tail. Not just a pictogram, but kind of table of contents where lines are written like sun rays, radiating from its baseline picture. Four seals of transformation painted into corners. Each one adorned with depicts of thorns and blades.

2nd and 3rd was wholly written in hundreds of tiny, vertical lines, like index instructions, necessary terms with page indication for every one. We had to zoom in to read any of it.

4th one had diagrams and inscriptions, aaaaaaaaaaaaa . . . introduction of methods . . . of how to shield captured soul essence from escaping its confinement? Something like that. Explanation what is needed to conjure elemental cage for consciousness, keeping it preoccupied with false signal of the warp. I didn't even read whole thing, just glossed over its content.

Sure as hell it deserved to be kept locked up in vault, but now . . . the cat was out of the bag. It was very very very very very bad. I had a very bad feeling about this. All this mess was piling up in geometrical manner. I . . . sunk into thinking about possible explanations, but there was no escaping reality. Kaifas had to bring me back to real world with words. I was absent for almost ten minutes and he begun to worry those blasphemous pages worked on me.

There was plethora of concerns to discuss., yet my health wasn't one of them. I told him that . . . I knew what it was. Obviously, he would not suffer being held in suspension, demanding the truth. It was better he didn't know, but . . . there was part of knowledge which could be of use to him. Grimoire was obviously heretical, however it did not have anything to do with symbols we have seen cultists use. I told him it was xeno artifact and . . . he saw right through me. He has seen eyes of desire in me. Mind of a man whose thirst of understanding cannot be quenched in mere knowledge.

He insisted that I be straightforward with him. Because . . . he wanted to know as well. But, what the hell was I supposed to do. Preferably nothing, but at this point it was . . . just so damn heavy to know everything by myself.

I told him book was written in very, very ancient eldar lexicon, most probably by fallen Eldar and it was better no one would ever use this book to any means. Besides, there was no one who would authorize research of this item in the first place. We would never be able to officially enter the vault.



Officially. Is the keyword.

For him, if was possible once, it can be done again. Manner in which he proposed this solution was alarming, not to say blasphemous. It was . . . so nagging, so . . . abrupt and full of emotions. Very unlike Magos at all. I didn't tell him, but . . . this visceral and substantial desire, no, demand of my mind to know was excruciating. I had to reel myself in and counteract against my . . . whatever was working there. So visceral and real, it spread like inner fire through my flesh.

I started to walk around table, trying to thwart whatever this feeling was, knowing how dangerous is this knowledge. And boy, did I know how dangerous. . . and tempting. Seeing how mad scientists held no remorse for fate of masses they experiment on, it only brought memories of all those mutilated Nurgle demons to my mind.

I needed a few minutes to clear my mind. That thing was . . . Emperor knows how old. Certainly older than inquisitorial vault. It had connection to whatever was happening at that time in sector. He mentioned diary of inquisitor and accounts of first Mara, who was first to fight monsters on those worlds.

I had to calm him down as well. Reminded him that there is a reason why those things were locked away even in place that was already locked away. And forgotten. It was best we do not disturb this grave . . . yet . . . there was a way into it. A slither of temptation.

If he was willing to help us so much, then it would be best to get our hand on the inquisitorial diary. If there would be anything useful towards our current situation it had to be direct account of person best suited for this work. I was willing to cooperate with him in . . . procuring tomes of importance. He was . . . somehow disappointed in my reluctance.

Before it would get out of hand, I insisted he dispose of any data incriminating him in any way. But then, what about books that we need? Well, we didn't NEED them, but they would be a nice addition to our effort. Needlessly to say, Kaifas couldn't even begin to understand horrors of chaos invasion. We had Slaaneshi cultists readying for uprising. Who knows what monsters they already brought forth in places no one ever even knew about.

We agreed to not to act upon it, letting it lie in the vault, focusing on planet's well being first. Rooting out "heretics" came before anything. Those books weren't going anywhere. Much more important was to make sure we sort this mess out before inquisition arrives. I've seen too many times how inquisitors like to make sure they didn't omit possible suspects.

We parted ways around 20 hours. Sun begun decline behind mountains and I was tired enough to go to sleep. And then remembered, that we had sortie in the evening. This didn't bode well, so I called Frederick to ask about situation. Boys were ready and waiting for orders, but hearing about my state made him question me presence during operation. We postponed sortie by half an hour so I could get a coffee and supper. When we reached officer's landing pad, commissar pointed out my lack of armor. He was against my departure, but couldn't actually stop me.

Sky was getting gray. Clouds begun to close whatever remained of it. Even sun faded behind mountains. Atmosphere quickly became dark. Storm clouds gathered over city. Tallest spires were engulfed by mist. Around half an hour later, drizzle begun to come down.

With curfew we announced during day, streets have been emptied out. Only



essential workers were still allowed outside. Military transports scattered around city. To keep hive secured, Maroo decided to incorporate local gangs as cannon fodder. Some shady characters, supposedly at command of local sergeant gathered outside building in rows and were given basic weapon load outs under watchful eye of commanders.

We went inside apartment block to the basement, where current operation center for area 6 was located. We met with Major Bricks. Boys looked like ready to fight. They understood our goal is to bring prosperity back to people on planet and were . . . vociferous about sticking it to the nobles. Men had high hopes and morale. We went through attack plan, loosely adhering to *Tactica Imperialis*.

Yyyyyyyyyy, this . . . repair depo was located on eastern side of city, alongside main rail magistrate between Elkor and Wezun production center, somewhere 20 miles east. Magistrate featured heavy traffic of transports from space port and towards space port, but for purpose of operation, last train would be let through 1 hour before attack.

Compound had one entrance and one exit. Both of them guarded by heavy hydraulic gates. Appropriately huge, for huge train systems. Since it was military emplacement, big, slopped and thick walls surrounded environs of base with heavy bolter tarantulas guarding perimeter. Most important were loading cranes. We had to be careful not to blow them. Facility couldn't operate heavy equipment without them. And this was the biggest worry of Major, that soldiers loyal to Blacklight would blow them up if we tried to attack.

Our Storm Trooper squad was supposed to infiltrate and secure them while detachment of forces stormed from other side, making a distraction. Mastaf assumed that enemy was novice enough to fall for such trick. Frederick would take command of frontal assault. I . . . would do whatever I wanted to do. They expected me to stay behind and provide a decoration for news feeds, but it was not an option.

After all that happened, I decided to lead the assault from front line. Mastaf advised us that there was around 2000 soldiers guarding 13 500 workers and we should be very careful, which I returned saying there is no Warhound around this time. They kinda smiled and understood what it meant. No need to persuade them over anything. Commissar readied Leman Russ and its crew, Mastaf, Kimbly, Ojik and Theodolite received four more people at their command. Each one extremely well equipped as elites should. Kimbly couldn't hide his excitement, worrying rest of quad if he would botch this job.

Everyone was ready around 22 hours. Infiltration squad was given hover craft for quiet approach while our company rushed full throttle out of square. We met some minor resistance on the way, but everything went smoothly. Surprise element was never considered a possibility when rolling up in heavy equipment so we drove in as fast as we could. By the time we reached our goal it was something around 23 hours. Darkness played tricks with soldiers relying too much on equipment for targeting.

I was sitting on top of turret, inciting grumpy moans from Frederick, but my shielding made him admit just how useful were my methods.

Facility and rail system around was guarded by mere few scout sentries who operated remote charges for defense tactics. Few chimeras blew up, but most of soldiers inside managed to avoid death. Considering not even one turret shot at



us one bullet, we assumed it already was a trap luring us in and possibly blow up.

Once we dealt with defenders around wall, our assault was blocked by gate, which was still not open. Outer perimeter became eerily quiet after Blacklight abandoned positions. For a sprawling factory, it looked like nobody was home, even though our recon stated there were 13 500 people inside just 3 hours ago. I sensed faint traces of life somewhere deep in compound, but it might as well be just pack of dogs. Knowing there is chaos fuckery on the line, this meant trouble. We discussed it Frederick, while boys tried to get inside. Two men used grapple launchers to get on top of wall. Loosing no time, I . . . just jumped over by empowering myself with psychics. Operators went to search for control booth, while I carefully infiltrated deep into complex.

Indeed, there was no one inside complex despite lights being switched on all around. Fluggers stood empty, still parked into repair bays. Some machines still in operation mode. And there was that feeling . . . like you . . . feel that whatever you were doing, took too much damn time compared to what it should. A dozen times longer. Like . . . being exhausted, confused and yearning for things to finally end. I myself was tired but those feelings increased after carefully entering into complex. Once I reached main building, Bricks reported successful entry into compound.

Main building was multiple level repair factory for all kinds of heavy equipment. Trains, military vehicles, aerial transporters, even small barge ferry on main landing pad. It was all lighted up. Smell of warm oil still lingered in the air. Huge ventilators lazily spun on ceiling. Working equipment has been mostly put back into their place. Welding packs and power tools still in equipment bays.

And then I felt a swelling of energy underneath, somewhere in basement with very distinctive stench of sweet, rotting perfume. I can't explain it well. To me . . . I can feel those energies with my aetheric body like you smell with nose. You know . . . how psykers have different interpretation of extra sensory perception.

I run towards this point without hesitation, fully prepared for combat. Tight corridors of personnel quarters were filled with emotions of dread, almost to point of tasting it with mouth. The closer the distance, the greater the fear. After I reached basement, first sign of chaos activity laid apparent.

Bodies of workers swung on ceiling hooks. with their eyes gauged, bare chests cut and skinned, pelvises removed, innards hanging freely from whatever was left. There was no time to loose. As soon as I opened gate to storage facility, hellish screams and noises started to faintly reach me. Obvious chaos ritual. I felt this rotten energy on my spirit like wind blowing on my skin.

Any resistance appeared only after reaching further down to lift operation systems. Cultist tried to barge my way with everything they got. In confines of corridors it was very easy to hit me, but ultimately futile. No amount of firepower they carried would be near enough.

Even though there was huge disproportion in bullet quantity, factory had millions of projectiles ready for use. Tools, wall fixtures, rails, girders or even rebar within walls if necessary. Despite high quality gear, their feral nature voided any possible tactic advantage they could have. Crazy with blood and lust of killing, they would not hesitate to charge right at me even after seeing I could throw them around like ragdolls. Or squash into pulp with just a thought.



Screams gotten louder and I stopped playing around. It was imperative to reach whoever was screaming as soon as possible. Most simple and effective is bursting people's brains with psychic discharge. Discharge of high current energy from my shield effectively fried brains of everyone present in hundred meter radius. Shoving aside all bodies, I run towards screams.

Alloy reclamation chamber has been setup for a demon summoning ritual. Nine shrines in form of electrocuting cages were hastily welded up from scrap or whatever was easy to find at hand. Some parts looked like ripped from other machines. In center, industrial grinder used for shredding junk and scrap for furnaces, was filled with blood and remains of thousands of victims it already engulfed.

Whoever remained alive, was already chained in lines, being dragged hastily out of shoddy build cages inside resource dumps. As soon as cultist saw me, they dropped ritual, trying to run. I wouldn't let them. In spur of anger, I caught them all in freezing grasp and threw into the grinder. Few who managed to hide between people, avoiding carnage, begged for mercy even from, afar yelling that they were made to do those things. People in cages screamed for help. While I was still on upper catwalks, overseeing chamber, I dealt with shrine constructs ripping them apart and then stopped grinding machine.

Instead of killing rest of cultist, I wrapped them in bars ripped out of cages, and pinned them to wall with chains. People cried while cages opened. Almost out of their mind, paralyzed with fear, few of them stayed inside, still reciting prayers of Emperor. Some tried to kill cultists, but I forbade it. They would be sent to Adeptus Sororitas for interrogation. It naturally ruse up roar of woes against me, blaming me for everything that happened to them, to their people, to their world . . . ehhhhhhh . . . Suddenly, I became worst trash, mutant and heretic. Nothing out of ordinary.

I helped some of them to put back twisted joints, broken bones and wrap up some most heinous wounds while calling for reinforcements. Telling people to wait for help as our soldiers would soon arrive calmed them a bit. After whole slaughter, only a bit over 400 survived. I wanted to search for more survivors but then, some just begged me to stay. They didn't want to be left alone again. While waiting, we had a chat about what the actual fuck happened. There was one shift master who told me that due enacting new war policies, this complex saw doubling size of workforce as well as security. They weren't surprised to see soldiers, knowing that large amount of military equipment was refurbished. Said that after afternoon shift, around 17 hours, soldiers started to shoot people. They chained all workers and put them in cages, some were transported out in train wagons. Apparently, amount of people . . . thrown into grinder was somewhere around quarter of registered workers.

We heard some shots in corridors. People tried to get back to cages in panic. Fortunately, it was our boys who had encounter with whoever was still lurking inside. Once we heard Frederick leading charge with few dozens of soldiers behind, people sighed with great relief and joy.

We talked on catwalks as soldiers tended to people, to talk over what happened. While relaying what I heard, he informed me they lost contact with infiltrator team. We feared the worst. After what he witnessed in room, he wished that they were just dead, not used in such blasphemous way.



In the first place, we had to call Sororitas. He did not understand why. I had to explain to him corruption of chaos without exact explanation. It was just said . . . that to make sure all those people are . . . mentally healthy, Sisterhood must check for any point of . . . deviation in their minds and souls. This meant that we could not let them out just yet but certainly we had to move them to different place. We ended up staying at dining hall. It took two hours for witch hunters to arrive.

Priest, I think he was Mathias, Matheus or something, in company of 10 sisters greeted us in entrance to the main building. They brought as well 8 hospitalers, apothecary and one hunter squadron. While whole retinue went to check upon workers, Frederick, me, priest and sister superior came down to reclamation chamber.

We talked about what happened and what we learnt during assault. They were flabbergasted about audacity of our enemies to enact such unholy rituals right under seat of power. Sister Selesia was visibly angered and infuriated they failed to detect this cult in time. Priest asked me to sit with them in separate chamber to undergo litany of purification. You can imagine my disdain for this idea. Frederick, however, felt that he had to go through prayers. What I needed was full spectroscope and wavelength multi-meter. While commissar exercised his faith, one of hospitaler brought servitor with needed instruments. Selesia seemed to know what was going on. She knew what I was searching for. Apparently monastery provided lessons about this topic, but none of sisters ever thought to have need for those devices. Servitor walked rounds around sacrificial pit, mapping energy signatures. We have seen on my PDA hologram how they were disturbed. I taught her a thing or two about how to read device, some basic hallmarks and main points of interest and oh boy did she got suspicious. I simply lied, that techpriests thought me those tricks.

This time we had a big, giant disturbance in fabric of time. Not nearly enough to enact warp rift, but enough to thin the veil. Depending on who cast the ritual, he could have pierced to the warp and become infested with demonic parasites, creating physical portal for them.

We spent half an hour consulting data. After we wrapped up, I asked her about this course she mentioned. According to her, it was something every Sister Superior learn during their additional training as their regimental set of inherent capabilities. It was intriguing to know most of Sisters were kept away from this knowledge. Asking a bit further, I got to know that it was in curriculum since time immemorial together with litanies of purification and chants of rejection. She wouldn't explain chants of rejection and outright refused to tell me anything, anymore. I was getting suspiciously too confident. Imagine.

Inside mess hall, sisters almost completed their work as well. Fortunately, they did not discover any problems whatsoever of . . . immaterial nature, but urged to put them under ecclesiarchy oversight. I left decision making about his situation to Selesia. Half of troops would pack up and return. Whoever remained stayed under her command.

As we walked out of building, Frederick started to speak about infiltrator team. Contact has been reestablished. They were pursuing truck transports fleeing from refurbishing plant. It was very vague and he spared detail but two of operators and Jason Theodolite were dead. Casualties started to mount up.



Mastaf secured transport of humans heading outside city, numbering almost 4200 people. They were waiting for backup and asking what to do. I said to return them to working complex and report to sister superior. After she dismissed their squad, they could come back to command.

We arrived back at palace at 27:30 local. I was totally beat up and went straight to bed.





— Arrival Day [75_] — Pursuit day [61_] — Day of reign [29_] —

Next day wasn't anything better. Heavy rain poured down on city all morning. Heavy clouds blocked sky even at this altitude. It was very . . . sad. News about recent skirmishes and fist casualties of civil war circulated among people.

Council room was in use since 9 AM. Advisory body worked somewhat swiftly, despite only legal and social departments being present. Krietlig was pleased to see me, shouting his greeting from moment I stepped in room. Without any sense of shame, came close to me, prodding about what transpired inside refurbishing complex, being very curious and excited. There was something repulsive about him. He held his aura clean, but my aetheric body felt slimy, sweet, rotten paste all over his spirit. I exchanged greetings with Borot and told Constantine this knowledge is better not known, especially those who are so faithful to the Emperor, while marching to office for breakfast.

There were already stacks of papers in need of signature. After preliminary assessment, they all could have been approved by council chancellors, yet someone dropped it on my desk. I went back to legal team to talk it over. We now had sister dialogus in ranks, which was very helpful. We needed to make a council who can make decisions under governor's and vice governor's absence. I asked what was then purpose of having different segments in advisory body if it would melt into one anyway. Sister Diana delicately suggested venerable Cardinal Krietlig would make everyone's work impossible hard if he wasn't one in decision making. Apparently, being governor's consul of strategic importance was not enough.

I knew where it was going. And I told her there would not be such a thing. Since Maroo was not around to make most important decisions, there needed to be someone else who can. Administratum within Mara subsystem was mostly a melting pot of all branches crossing over their capacities.

It was apparent to me, that all those branches needed to become independent to be efficient without spending needless time on fighting over hierarchy of importance. And cut ecclesiarchy out of governmental authority. This didn't go well. Most of counselors couldn't imagine division between law and religion. Krietlig roused up in stormy humor, fearing for his demoting. He had to be assured he would remain strategic chancellor in strategic planning council.

To achieve such goal, advisory body needed someone who knew their craft. Few people pointed towards lady sitting across me, Olga Mikava. I delegated her as leader of legal team and head figure for resolving problems over lex imperialis in time of my absence, while ordering to prepare draft of this endeavor. She shrieked and shuddered on thought alone about this gigantic undertaking. I promised her all the manpower she would need. For now, their new mission was to create clear and functioning bureaucratic structure with clear competency guidelines. Without need of governor's seal of approval on everything. Up to my surprise, they were positively thrilled. I really wondered how they would tackle segregation administration from corporate influence.

I could go back to office to think through our next steps. Few minutes later Maroo would report to office and brief me about current situation on multiple fronts. As expected, forces in city would be making huge leaps of territorial



acquisition. He estimated capital would be wholly ours in matter of 3 to 4 days. Everything was diametrically different in western districts of continent. Vast forces of Blacklight controlled most of food production coming in from Regna and Reina hydroponic facilities, accounting for 25% of food output, which was funneled to our enemies. Freighters picking up those goods were escorted by Blacklight's own fleets. As far as we knew, they were shipped outside subsector. One of freighters was traced to asteroid field in system I name don't remember. It unloaded its cargo at one of asteroids and came back to Mara. What happened to it, we didn't know, but it was fair to estimate to label it as drop point. We couldn't tackle this . . . freight shenanigans because our fleet were spread thin already. Most of our forces engaged Orks on eastern fringes. Commanding general of Riktus Prime, capital of Kata Jay subsystem, Morgabius del Porru sent plead of reinforcements. Apparently twelve cruisers lost already were not enough . . . I swear, the sheer audacity of those fucking dumbasses made my stomach twist.

Maroo tried to defend him, speaking his mind out about previous government's plans for weakening subsector's position. Problem lied in Ork numbers not in lack of support.

Maybe if it was just local PDF, then yes. But he had sector's stronghold, namely Dolan's Gate naval base under command. Most of our fleet was stationed at this choke point. He evacuated it to focus on preserving his world, which led to catastrophic results.

They had only PDF securing local sites. Lokinyth sent some of their skitari, but Waagh was estimated to number almost 20 000 000 Orks. We knew Riktus Prime, as pleasure world lacked proper defense, was screwed already, but mining guilds on other planets in Riktus were great source of rare metals used at manufactorum. Gold Palaldium, Platinum, and even Adamantium veins found in local Kuiper belt. To make sure forges could work once more, we needed those mines.

It was a pickle. Normally, imperial general would need advantage 10:1 against Orks and a lot of heavy equipment. I mean heavy. Basilisks, Manticores, Banekblades, Titans Which we had little to none. What we had to spare in subsector was already concentrating on eastern fringes. Rest of subsectors also sent all their military ships, but it wasn't as much as Mara could provide. I saw what was happening. This play with Orks was just meant to empty local star systems.

In addition, previous night, Blacklight's PR department already issued statements and manifestos. They openly declared war against tyrannical governor . . . I wished I killed von Rosette even more.

I called Huges without hesitation, asking if there is anything we could spare. We could send people already in ranks and in part, heavy equipment. Taking back refurbishing plant allowed us to repair a lot of equipment damaged in revolution, but that would take around 70-80 days. Especially repairing Stormlords.

I had to do something right now. I was torn between going myself and sending our heavy equipment. In the end, our planetary enemies had access only to the same, locally produced weaponry, just in greater numbers. On the other hand, discipline and military regime of our soldiers had already proven to be of superior value. General Karnak and 4th regiment was successfully pushing on



northern plowing fields of Olman district. That was another 15% of food production we missed out on. Securing that alone would satisfy at least planetary needs.

There was also problem of corporations' audacious damage compensations claim due to war efforts. All of them were filed by subsidiaries of Malte incorporated. I ordered to outright refuse any rebuilt permits and hold subsidizing until whole corporation is brought to the heel. Food was still in short supply. Whatever we could procure by reclaiming farms, went to feed local populations. We were still missing 93% of total food output, although data showed reclaiming eastern side should go without much resistance.

On top of that, Wezun production plant, rather a city, was besieged by enemy forces. We had to commit a lot of people to keep facility in our hands. It created a front line on middle plains, almost cutting continent in half. Blacklight had build series of fortified bases along main roads leading to Melchior and Batatus cities on west side, creating almost 1000 miles of no man's land of rocky plateaus. Whole cascade of Tablespike mountains was left unguarded by both sides. Mostly barren place, with no strategic importance. Main problem however laid in supply lines coming from west. Wezun was dependent on ore deposits of mining guilds. Without those, we might have as well build wooden shacks and weld sticks to stones. Someone never thought to build resource dump area near production center, but use old sea ports 4000 miles away as raw ore transition points. And nobody dared to question it.

I decided not to send any more reinforcements to Riktus Prime. If we couldn't get control of food supply, whole damn sector could collapse. Securing farms took first and foremost priority.

As we were ending our meeting, Frederick came in. He had good news and bad news. Jason and two others would have funeral ceremonies next day at main cemetery, alongside dozens of other soldiers who died in first days. The good news were about Sororitas, who managed to capture "some kind of cultist captain", yeah . . . He was still awaiting interrogation, just like this bunch I sent them. All were currently held at St Basil Cathedral, a local base of operations for Sororitas.

Coming back to subject of food supply, I told Maroo we needed those hydroponic plants. Both agreed, but we had no men to spare to assault such strongholds right now. According to Maroo, it was defended by four Knight Errants, a two whole armored battalions and two full infantry corps. Not to mention Reina citadel just 80 miles south west. Attack on those entrenched positions should be a last resort. Reina was incidentally HQ of Blacklight operations. It had large space port and naval port. Also, above Reina district, stationed BL's main starport with cruiser, two frigates and seven destroyers currently resupplying. Since spaceport at Elkor was now mainly vacated due to shortages, Reina boasted most traffic. It was safe to assume that southern-west hemisphere was controlled by von Rosette, while we had most opportunities in north. Our greatest advantage was heavy industry, which was mostly situated in near proximity to Elkor. If we could bring in resources, we would outproduce them by geometric factor.

But that was the problem. We needed those resources first. And right now, the best place to acquire them were eastern mining guilds, now under occupation of Blacklight.



I called over Abrax, since he was very helpful many times. As Artisan, his manufacturing expertise was needed to devise a plan of approach. According to him, overseers of mining facilities were working just fine. Mechanicus did not take sides, continuing their work as always, thus gathering information from both sides. Issue lied in control of rail system running via mountains. Those were treacherous grounds. Since tunnels under plateau were built, visits to wilderness became sporadic. Only local communities utilized those for farming.

Main tunnel, allowing for mass transit between east and west, was blocked in multiple places by BL operatives. Not a considerable force, but we inferred they would blow up tracks if anything were to happen. According to Abrax, rails could be repaired in matter of few weeks with equipment available at refurbishing plants. Incidentally, second plant was in use by mining guild near Melchior, operating open mines and resource drop points on east coast. Only real problem was intentional collapsing of tunnels. This would take large amount of machinery to reconstruct. There was another rail system following feet of mountains to south, which was usable as roundabout way, but it would take 5 times as much. For now, eastern side of continent seen no fighting at all and civilian conducts remained undisturbed. Olman district would be first to see real war.

It was time to put our aerial forces to good use. We decided to take enemy by surprise, in fast attack, blitzkrieg style combat. Circumvent their defenses by dropping storm troopers behind lines and taking out points of interest before front line could react.

I asked Abrax if he had any flying machine schematics we could use for immediate production. Turned out he did have few. We took a look at blueprints and decided for one. Nothing fancy, a double rotary blade gunship hovercraft designated as MI-200 Saiga. If we could secure resources, head Magos of Wezun facility could adjust production. We gave him a call and estimated needed resources as well as time for production. For every one Valkyrie we had, we could build 100 of those. Enough for planetary warfare. But then, we went over overall production capabilities of plant and it looked uninviting.

Manufactorum produced almost exclusively civilian, consumer items of everyday use, supplying about 60 % of all basic items of need on planetary scale. Anything from forks, kitchen sinks, radiators, bikes and cars up to trucks, drills, rock crushers, hoists, cranes, you name it, it produced. In addition, it would take almost a year to relocate production for military use.

Instead, I asked what would it take to build new production plant focused on local pattern war equipment, not necessary standard imperial armory. Oh, how happy were they to hear such proposition. Fabricator Ergomix eagerly declared that if resources were present, they could build facility in one moth capable of output of 2 000 units of heavy equipment, which was about as much as whole planet at this time.

After long discussion, I decided to green lit this new military complex. We would deploy on northern hemisphere and take back mining guilds through Olman district, without focusing on tunnels for now. Abrax offered us council in absence of Magos Kaifas if need be. It was very welcomed.

We finished at time of dinner, about 15 hours. Due to shortages, even palace's cuisine had to step down a notch. I decided it wouldn't be appropriate to throw lavish dishes, somewhat sharing fate of our people.



Maroo went back to central command. Frederick went back to Administratum to make sure resources were allocated. Well . . . for time being we had to stop producing luxurious goods for aristocracy to free resources. Abrax was delighted to see return of resource efficiency. Every noble house however had completely opposite view, flooding my council with litanies of butt hurt as soon as our decree appeared at news board.

Few hours later, I would get calls from Maroo and his assistants about plethora of people complaining about my order. Gossip spreads like wildfire. Even Marcus de Estana called me to clarify the situation. We talked about it for two hours. He wouldn't relent. I think he tried every possible angle of approach to sway me. In the end it did soften me up and I agreed to compromise. What nobles want the most? Parties. Food, drinks, clowns, luxury palaces and . . . "company". You know. They don't give a fuck about war going on on their world. From one side I understood why they were like that and from yet another side, I had obligations to people, which I understood they did not care about.

In the end, we listed few products they could not live without, like . . . gold jewelry, cakes, champagnes, and agreed to leave it at 20% capacity, but they would have to give up luxurious personal AV, fleets and factories for time being. Of course, he didn't like it, but according to him, if it meant sooner resolution of their "woes" he would convince other houses to . . . toss in some of their pennies as well. I related to him what we needed to build new military plant. Mainly raw ores like iron, titanium, cobalt, copper, platinum, adamantium, etc. He told me that right now, mining colonies were at huge net loss. Even his own mining companies had severe lack of manpower. It was also a reason why nobody traded raw resources anymore.

This . . . got my attention so I continued to drill the subject. Ha ha ha . . . aaaahhhhhh yes . . . And he told me that in recent weeks, just a little bit two standard months ago, mining crews went on strikes at every mining outpost. Guilds tried to remedy this, but when two weeks ago, "parleying parties" arrived at locations, whole colonies were empty. Some of them with significant signs of destruction. No survivors or even bodies left behind.

This made me reconsider why there was no major cult movement on planet. They prayed upon colonies in simple, quick, hit and run methods. It was best not to tell him my suspicions who and how did it. We made a deal anyway. I would get him workers back to those places, however in turn he would . . . "donate" half of production towards our war efforts and oh boy, was he overjoyed. Being one of very few working mines would get him a leverage even his wealth could not. Tremendous opportunity lighted glimpse of joy into those old eyes. He already schemed how to procure appropriate equipment and transports. I promised to get him workers and security. Everything else was on his shoulders.

As soon as we finished, I made a collective call to Abrax, Huges , Olsmo, Maroo and Kwintet. Luckily they were free to speak. I told them about new situation and opportunity. They agreed this was way easier procurement of resources than storming through continent. We refocused our plans, making recruitment campaign adjustments according to Abrax's advice as priority, sacrificing part of conscript base for mining operations. I left planetary offensive manner to them for time being and asked Russel to drop by my office tomorrow. We ended that call around past 26 hours. I was mentally fatigued and went straight to bed.



— Arrival Day [76_] — Pursuit day [62_] — Day of reign [30_] —

As I laid under sheets in the morning sun, I once again distracted myself with thoughts of impending doom, still unable to believe that . . . governing thing. That feeling of . . . being in over my head subsided, yet unease thoughts of what could erupt at any time due to chaos influence, made me stand on my toes. By 6:50 I couldn't rest anymore.

I got back to office by 7:20, ate, and called high command. Admiral wasn't yet in office so I told dispatcher to inform commanding officer I was changing plans and it will be me coming to command, so Kwintet should just wait in office.

After instructing Kimbly, who was now Mastaf's substitute, about my plans, giving our team freedom to take leave and attend Theodolite's funeral and send him my regards. He saluted with watery twinkle in his eye.

Albatross headed directly on upper landing pad so I didn't have to walk too much. We met in one of commanders briefing rooms. Talked with Kwintet about our planned approach to send supporting unit for mining operations. I helped him with few ideas how to arrange transportation, but my main concern remained making sure that whatever was lurking in those mines, had to be dealt with in first place.

It didn't leave me with much choice. I would embark on corvette, take two or three companies and brush it clean before workers arrive. He was very against of wasting my time with this minor thing . . . until I reminded him that there could be more "sinister" reason behind it, which stopped his protest completely. However, he proposed we contact sororitas, just in case. Sisters did not have their own navy, but I could "persuade" ecclesiarchy to find "donors" to their . . . righteous cause.

We tried to call Monastery, but without any luck. Sister dialogus informed us that all officers were busy and could not contact us. We had to wait until palatines finish their regime.

While waiting for that communication, I could take a look at command center's holovids. We went through current forces compositions. Our biggest ship, Basket of Thorns was Exorcist-class grand cruiser under direct command of Sisters of Battle and main seat of power for canoness Janna. It was too big for local shipyards and had to be maintained at Lokinyth, currently deployed over Riktus Prime. Inventory included 1 Avenger grand cruiser - Gaze of Void, 1 Exorcist grand cruiser - Basket of Thorns, 5 Dauntless, 4 Endeavor, 4 Defiant, 4 Endurance cruisers, 9 Sword, 6 havoc, 6 Falchion frigates, 32 destroyers and 12 defense monitors. Unfortunately, almost half in refurbishing yards. Hephaestus, despite being Administratum World and center of sector, had little under half of this strength overall, since Mendaz shifted power center to Mara. Despite not being sector's command, this subsector was indeed backbone of entire Battlefleet. So much, that even Lord Admiral Socket, despite having the status, wasn't able to frivolously order our Battlegroup, which in turn brought even more screeching animosities between Hephaestus and Mara on political scene. In Kwintet's estimation, von Rosette's game of power made capital despise our subsector as much as heretics. They wouldn't help us even if Orks posed threat to them, provided they would wipe us out in the process.



It intrigued me why was Mara so well equipped. One of officers stated that since Martens' reign military forces seen upgrade to better quell local populous, on and off planet. I asked how would he even know that. Kwintet excused him with his own explanation.

During wars of last century, about during time Amelia Alastor rose to prominence, governor requisitioned from forgeworld's shipyard commission of reparations. From what he heard, it took almost 60 years to build required ships, due to food and metal shortages. He suggested, delicately, that the shadow government expansion might have served as needed catalyst for bringing those resources to forges. With recently acquired knowledge, he could estimate how deep did it go.

I asked if there were any more requisitioned unit under way. No. Order was completed in M41.972. Just at the time Martens came to power. Voices at the time were vary varied when it came to governor's backing. I inferred if this whole crusade was incited to just get rid of forces capable of fighting against overtaking palace. He didn't have enough data but agreed with my sentiment.

We switched to subject of missing shipments. It was very urgent matter. According to their scanners, merchant guild traders went into neighboring star system, ILU-4, with full cargo holds, but on their way back everything was emptied. There were few scouts dispatched but none could pinpoint any location within system. We went through available units to prepare to journey out to mines in system ILU-7, which was just one stop behind ILU-4. Star systems Named ILU were uninhabited and largely unused spaces, outside patrol routine, but not yet inter-sector space. Number 7 had vast riches of rare metals located within system and I was curious why it was unprotected despite being such rich source of rare metals.

According to Russel, previous governor explicitly forbade lending military forces outside subsector. They were focusing on making sure miners near Lokinyth system are secure. Mainly because those paid taxes to administration. Any outposts not paying taxes were denied protection. I asked how many of those were there. Admiral didn't have exact answer but from what he managed to learn in past few days, coincidentally most of those places were own by Ervin von Rosette. Amounting to about 70% of all guilds. However from what was known, mining guilds took part in only 40% of all mining operations, official sanctioned providers consisted only for 58% of total supply. Officers in room seemed to know how dire was situation of local economy. Stranglehold of de Estana on mining amounted to half of overall output of whole subsector. Including gold mining.

We moved to situation in orbit. There was already one skirmish between small fleets near mining planet within system. First two planets, Grogis and Opulent, are crisp burnt hellholes, unsuitable for anything. Mara is 3rd planet from star. Planet number 4, Duskin, is barren, rocky world, suitable for mining.

When it came to Mara itself, Blacklight had too little firepower to challenge void supremacy, but its fleet composed of thirty smaller ships capable of hits and runs, employed pirate tactics. This happened over Duskin's Driben-3 Mining facility. Planet was actually named after guild owning mining rights. It was biggest iron and aluminum excavating site in subsector. Freighters stationed in orbit have been raided before shuttles could load them fully. In ensued battle, one of freighters dropped to surface, the second one was damaged and escorted to



shipyard. Our fleet managed to cripple one corvette and disarm one frigate, but in the end Blacklight disengaged without inflicting much damage to our voidships. This very shipment of basic resources was supposed to be used in building of new construction plant. Anything else we managed to safely land in forges, had be used in upkeep of civilian population, least farms totally collapse. It put pressure on our successful revitalization of de Estana's mines.

Data about said facilities came in the very same morning, as we agreed last night. Star system ILU-7, despite being outside influence area was very well scouted. Due to huge, rare mineral deposits it was also vastly documented. Consisted of only two planets and one planetoid, but there was huge quantities of asteroid floating around outer belt. Marcus had four major drilling spots. If estimates we saw were true, it held enough resources to supply Mara alone for next 2 000 years. A great boon, however, due to far distance from any habitable world, very few decided to risk flying whole week through no man's space.

Now, excavation site lied barren and empty. Whatever data we had about situation within colonies came from report of supposed mediators. It wasn't any reliable intel, but we had vague idea what would be needed. My first estimates were removed from reality.

Complex 2, the biggest one, located directly on barren planet, was in need of over 200 000 workers, 372 techpriest and huge amount of supplies to operate. Complex 1 and 3 were mobile refineries in asteroid fields, numbering 23 000 staff each.

And . . . once gain. I had that very bad feeling about this. Something wiped out whole operations. Whatever happened to workers was not known. I . . . expected worst after my adventure at refurbishing complex. If we indeed would find chaos forces there, our whole fleet had to be present to kill whatever gestated out of its rot. Nevertheless, a nagging feeling deep inside me screamed I had to go there. Something pulled me towards it.

After dinner, Huges joined us in our discussion with news about other mining colonies. Apparently yesterday's hit on supply routes was not the only one. Even Lokinyth seen catastrophic loss of freighters due to shootout of local reinforcements. Due to fabricator's demise, there was confusion who is responsible for defense forces, and before any commands were issued, Two cruisers raided starport over Lokinyth III sinking four loaded freighters and hijacking one. Mechanicus expressed extreme displeasure to see how Astra Militarum was so inefficient and slow to react. Looters run away just in time before fleet arrived while two ships of Mechanicus fleet tried to defend. Few stray shots hit southern edges of manufactorum, disabling two berths at resource transfer docks, over southern processing plants.

I asked if they ever detected possible traitors or spies in their ranks. They looked at each other in unease gaze. Commissar decided to speak reluctantly about multiple investigations conducted "in background". They had ideas who was relaying orders to enemy but they wanted to be sure. I couldn't blame them for not knowing. After all, this was just High Command, they had to rely on others to follow orders. Especially if captains had no fucking idea what was happening at homeworld.

I wanted to know if Mechanicus made any claims or forwarded any diplomatic letters. He assumed that if any were to be issued it would take few



days just to process it through Administratum. And knowing what kind of situation Hephaestus was right now, it would take a year or two to reach palace. I was flabbergasted. Of course, scribes have to process tons of scrolls every day but how was it possible that such high priority request take so much time. There were few factors. First and foremost, Orks. Second, Lokinyth was in turmoil after death of fabricator, and Hephaestus had very . . . petty governor, who was bickering about how Mara begun to overtake his world in matter of importance in those few last years. He could not stand fact, that despite being administration center world of whole sector, Amschel was boasting more power and fame. He would do anything in his strength to bring his political foes to grinder. From what they heard, Centuro Clavish, the Sector Lord, had his advisors doing everything for him while he fooled around on parties or grand balls, grooming very good standing with ecclesiarchy. In addition, there was citadel of Ordo Hereticus stationed on Hephaestus Secundus. Our little branch of Adeptus Sororitas couldn't compare in politics, despite being on forefront of every conflict. I asked them if they knew what kind of tithe did administration world pay. They didn't have slightest idea, because administration world never paid such.

We went back to ironing out our approach to mining facilities. It wasn't few minutes till someone run inside, carrying urgent request for air support. General Karnak needed immediate help with advancing forces of separatists. They were loosing foothold at local airport. Huges took scroll and called 4th regiment, reading it very carefully. Command center of military base outside Olman City informed that general was currently on the front line, inspecting artillery potions. I stepped into conversation, telling them to put satellite images on display and asked why did they sent a fucking letter instead of calling for reinforcements. Dispatcher responded in panic that this was the procedure. And I was furiously flabbergast which idiot decided sending a SCROLL was a procedural necessity. Huges took it upon himself, speaking about previous admiralty and their view on warfare. To me, this was absurd. It actively hampered any fluent conduct of command.

I asked how many more absurds like this were in practice. Admiral did not understand my meaning. They were so entrenched in this bureaucratic ideas, they couldn't think it was dysfunctional in first place.

I authorized dispatch of 15 Valkyries to his command. I had Huges make preparations and send craft loaded with whatever supplies our soldiers needed. Then, we had a little chat with admiral about swift issue of orders. There were multiple places where exchange of information had to be allowed and approved by superior officers, but mostly, it all had to bear seal of administration, adding few layers of paper work into process.

By evening, Most of this bullshit was cut out. All new guidelines had to be implemented immediately. Kwintet had one of his officers archive our resolutions. All information about new procedures was to be available for all soldiers. Ranks of officers had to be informed of its availability.

When we talked about those . . . extra steps taken every time something was supposed to be done, he had troubles with understanding how I could cut 75% of procedures he had to put up with all his life. Never did he question validity of those rules. As young captain they were drilled into him as set in stone. Nobody would question military discipline or bureaucracy. But to him, most incomprehensible, is that I did all of this on the fly, without moment of hesitation



or even consultation from lexicanum or Tactica Imperialis. Worst of all, it made sense after explaining to him the gist of the matter.

I told him that he, as Admiral, had to understand what it means to be flexible and adjusting to situation. He was . . . very rigid in his way of commanding. However, there was a glimpse of strategic exploit in it. It was understood, universally throughout sector, that one does not deviate from Tactica Imperialis. Since there was no . . . outside influence, even mercenary groups had to work in such manner. This meant our enemies had to have same, rigid, unmovable structure of command with troubles for adjusting. He concurred that all plans had to be designed and played out in advance like any sensible commander does, enumerating steps on each level. Once he ended, I brought his attention to how much time everything had to be planned and even one wrench in this cog would topple all operations. Needless to say, he wouldn't understand how their version of Tactica Imperialis has been twisted from it's original form, as most of navy operates in core worlds.

Our enemies operated in the same way they did before. All it took was one failure to make them reconsider. And knowing von Rosette, who would be too impatient to wait for everyone, prone to hasty action, putting his soldiers as well as effort, in peril. Russel finally begun to grasp what I had in mind. But, our supper had to end. There was still matter of ILU 7.

Fortunately nothing else happened that day and I went back to palace just after 22 hours local, with spare time to shuffle through documents left on my desk.





— Arrival Day [77_] — Pursuit day [63_] — Day of reign [31_] —

Next day was nothing exciting. I went back to high command, we ironed out our logistics, I managed to contact palatine Leonida to get her support in upcoming detachment and we finished connecting loose ends of military procedures.

In the evening, back at palace, I spoke with Maroo about front lines. He was very convinced that unlike fight in the outer space, war on ground was very static. Except for Olman Fields, whole front became stagnate. There were multiple skirmishes, bombardments, even takeovers, but at large, both sides entrenched positions in their starting point with little capacity for assault due to such large stretch of forces.

I asked about air support Karnak received. General was using air support in very effective way, delivering precision bombing runs, but his ordnance would run out in three weeks. Our production plants were starved to point of halt. People revolted due to lack of food. Due to reserves, there was just enough to feed population on starvation rations for 3 weeks, but once harvest comes, it would boast predicted food into stable level. That is, if those fields would hold out. Another case were Olman fields. Those were getting scorched. If Karnak couldn't take it with all support he was thrown in few last days, there was large probability of loosing entire crop due to arsons. Blacklight did not take prisoners, using tactics of scorched earth.

What was holding general back were large emplacements of artillery position inside higher city of Olman. Due to thin forces of PDF and few actual soldiers under his command, he could not afford to assault entire walled city.

With dose of relief, Maroo claimed capital city has effectively fallen into our jurisdiction, on the other hand . . . well, it already was under our control anyway. My involvement with on ground operations gave soldiers needed objectives. Taking capital back was a morale boost in itself. With this completed, they could send more reinforcements down river line to properly secure it. As of that time, our north- western quadrant of planet needed just few purges to get rid of Blacklight forces. There was also issue of Crimson Raiders. What were they up to, what remained of them till now, he couldn't answer, but assured me their numbers were so low, they really reverted to just petty thug organization without capability of destabilization.

Around 23:30 Nataniel came to pass urgent message from Command Center, which Maroo had to take care of. I went to my chambers, read few reports more, looked at satellite images and went to sleep around 25 hour local.



— Arrival Day [78_] — Pursuit day [64_] — Day of reign [32_] —

I got up late. I don't know if all this office work took greater toll on me than fighting Warhound, but getting more sleep didn't rest me.

After checking up on council room and quick briefing from Maroo in office, we had urgent call from Frederick asking to meet him at St Basil Cathedral. Sororitas managed to extract some knowledge from prisoners. We scrambled immediately.

I took Mastaf with Kimbly. Albatross could transport us only outside church premises and had to fly to landing pad at military outpost guarding ST Basil plaza. Cathedral is located on top layer of hive city, not far from Krietlig's Miniostorum. Only few chosen people have their estates there, but ... they are extravagant.

We entered through main gate into outskirt gardens. Even so high up, pillars and spires of shrine to the Emperor climbed into clouds. Huge, main entrance to holy grounds was almost 30 meters tall. Between hoisting pilaster columns of outer wall, giant, stained glass windows glossed in neon vivid colors of morning sun.

Tall, mighty, white trees covered cobblestone pathways in long shadows of wide branches. Their golden leaves humming in the wind. Garden premises filled to brim with side chapels, tall roofed, hosting figurines of saints. Few lighted candles in each one. Even in half distance, we could hear choir inside church. Hundreds of people on premises silently prayed under statues rising in the distance.

Frontal facade of cathedral was very definition of ridiculous waste of resources. Its side towers, climbing to the sky, separated by 100 meter tall, stained windows, depicting martyr ladies of imperial cult, within at least half kilometer tall spire, spearing into sparse clouds. Built on top of hive made them 2nd tallest points of structure on entire planet.

Its main entrance portal, was largely covered with rosette window and humongous wooden door, made out of thousands of dark, wood, long planks, stitched together by trims of adamantium.

Main nave of cathedral was build around hexagonal plan. Mighty, golden altar depicting all manners of cherubs and angels whirling under Emperor's statue. Cut in huge piece of red crystal, big as titan, refracted incoming light into all kinds of shimmering glares. Tall, white crystal sculptures of Sororitas, as standing on guard, crowded at sides of altar in heroic depictions, held in their hands swords and giant banners made of real cloth.

Massive dome over main square, built on web of smaller, slick and tall columns, let through colorful lights of giant decorated windows. At the end of eight corner columns, eagle heads held in beaks long, stone poles, on which carmine, cloth drape flags embedded with gold Aquila Imperialis flew down almost to the ground. Mosaic marble tiles on ground laid radially from enormous statue of Emperor, depicted shining light beacons, emanating from His feet. Its pedestal decorated with hundreds of alcoves, each with dozens of big candles blazing in golden flame. Thousands of pews and benches scattered inside. Each



one adorned with engraved imperial heraldry poured out of pure gold. Chandeliers of crystal bulbs and hundreds of golden arms hung low, attached to ceiling by hundred meter long, silver cables.

On upper floor balconies sisters form schola progenium sang in constant choir chant, Glory of The God Emperor. Its high gothic accent reverberated in harmony with crystal wind chimes posted on lanterns on surrounding columns. Its serene atmosphere and mighty splendor was indeed mind captivating. Perfect show of obnoxious hypocrisy instead of devotion. Nothing more than circus of power.

Most of people did not care about our presence. Few, who even noticed us in welter of pilgrims, were women of the order dialogus. Four armed sisters secured procession currently going around all shrines inside cathedral, performing purification rituals. We moved slowly towards altar. Someone was supposed to meet us. We sat in front row pews for time being.

Looking at this . . . altar . . . I couldn't imagine how simple folks wouldn't see this figure as god. All manner of tales and urban legends about their savior run through my mind as I closed my eyes. All manners of stupid shit I lived through because of what some brain dead asshole wrote ten thousand years ago. And no one ever knew that it was Lorgar who indoctrinated worship of Emperor into citizens. And I was there . . . sitting right in front of what He despised the most. Obnoxious show of power and control. A mesmerizing circus designed to hold your mind captive. Without questioning. Without thought. Blindly obeying words of a fucking book no one cared to ever validate.

It doesn't fill me with discomfort anymore. I know and understand how and why it all was happening, understanding people's need for guidance. I was well aware there was nothing else they could be offered, even by those who knew the truth. Unfortunate spin of events buried any hopes for truth, thousands of years ago.

And whoever was aware, became victim of their crime . . . of knowing, persecuted for challenging status quo . . .

We didn't have to wait for long. In few minutes, one of initiate sisters collected us. She led us through side gate towards administrative buildings of the order. Alleys we walked through were stripped of ornaments, yet filled with plants and trees. Occasional sculptures were cut in stone of building's facades.

Our meeting took place in obscure building at outer edge of covenant. Under western wall, few small magazines behind unused forge workshop, hid in basement old tunnels well covered behind blank wall. Wide passages were designed to fit trucks, if need be, for transportation of sensitive material. We ended up few meters below, in secretive facility hosting plethora of troublesome items. Sister Greta greeted us with honors and led through underground corridors to conference room where Frederick and Beatrice waited for us. There also was astropath, who . . . wasn't in his best condition.

Apparently they used him to extract information from others with ease. Until last one remained. That one turned out very adamant in his lack of cooperation. Even Frederick could not make him talk. Sisters tried to use psyker for this purpose, but he dropped half-dead in the attempt. Now, it was just a vegetable soul container with little stimuli response. They knew it was a serious thing, because they cooperated with him for years, boasting of 100% success rate.



In short briefing, I was told how cultists confessed to their allegiance to chaos and spoke of their role in organization. They had locations of various places in Elkor, which were already in process of purging, names who were now hunted and plans they could use. None could tell what exactly cult intended to do with massacre at refurbishing plant. Greta assumed nobody told them purpose of sacrifices.

This whole time I had a feeling somebody was watching us. Beatrice vowed that cameras were not present in the room and walls were so thick not even screams of heretics could escape. Two assistant initiates took out their rosaries to entwine it around their hands.

Frederick thought that state of this astropath could have induced unease in me due to possible fate I could face. I Reminded him that perils of the warp do not scare me due to my peculiar powers.

After investigator Beatrice explained everything, we marched towards prison cells. Uphhhhhhhh . . . you can imagine how Adepta Sororitas host their heretic prisoners. Not a cozy place.

Long corridor was illuminated with dozens of light fixtures in vault of ceiling. Every door to holding chamber had two sizable pilaster columns equipped with monitoring devices and vox caster beside command console. Massive floor stone tiles were visibly worn over hundreds of years. Dust and blood amassed in corners, blacking them out. Scratches and chippings in stone walls were already dusted due to time. Sporadic maintenance washed away only most intensive dirt. Bottom trimmings of winged doors already carved out their leveled stones and rotted with rust.

Chambers weren't numerous. Maybe ten. The first one the right was a tool repository. On opposite wall, a small medical room. Both without doors. We approached second room on the right.

After initiates opened door, we begun to hear moans of prisoner behind second pair of doors. We had to wait until first pair was closed and get scanned to go through. Inside viewing chamber with multiple machines, scriptorium and holo display stood table with various . . . contraptions for more intense interviews. Just like in inquisitorial dungeon. Cold and impersonal.

Behind glass windows and steel bars, chained to wall, stood our victim. Seeing what sisters done to him I wondered who was the real psycho here, immediately feeling chaos stench.

He was big and muscular. Already nude with body covered in his own blood. Something between adult man and a marine. Once, pretty face was now cut to pieces. Skin on left half of head was partially missing. Just like one eye, just like teeth. Skull cap blistered from burns. Muscles cut out in many places. His abdomen flayed, skinned and gut bloated out. Some cuts were still open and insides showed visible. Few big holes stitched together with stapler. Finger joints twisted in every possible angle, nails gone altogether. Just like three fingers. Under armpits, two sickle like blades twisted into his flesh. In his chest, chem and blood injector to keep him alive. Lower joints already twisted. Knee caps crushed. Toes of one feet cut off. Already castrated and stitched to prevent blood loss. Skin removed with dozens of cuts. Some muscles ripped open to the bone.

Beatrice was curious to see me cowering in disgust at this sight. She thought I would be more resilient considering what I claimed to experience already, and



blew in rage when I equaled their methods to chaos themselves. To her, this . . . thing under the wall was just meat bag. It wasn't human anymore, even if it tried to look like it. It didn't register to her that she just fed Slaanesh craving for suffering.

While she tried to convince me of her grandeur, immaculate service, prisoner laughed at her in contempt. Instead of lashing out some more punishment, she just cut off sound from chamber. I was amazed he was still capable of anything, much less such outburst of laughter, which guaranteed another solid torture. Even after prolonged sessions, his smug attitude would not diminish.

Betty advised me that he was a surprisingly tough bastard. When released from rebar I wrapped him around in, he instantly went into rage, killing one sister, two initiates, critically wounding four others, and destroying three servitors. Wounds on his chest and back were leftovers from chainsword attacks.

I asked to be shown whatever they had from this psyker's attempt on mind dive. She played back holo session of this encounter. What I saw was typical case of loosing one's mind when you dive too deep into the warp and get snatched by a harvester. Astropath managed to pull out immediately but his soul incurred irreversible damage. His consciousness was barely present in body at all. Before going into chamber I tried to dive into his head first to see what caused this.

We moved to empty side room. Mastaf was very skeptical of this, knowing my own mind was at stake, fearing I would end up in the same way. Betty cooled off and scolded him for being so faithless. We entered confessional through bar gate, rest remained in viewing room.

Once inside his consciousness, some nested parasite tried to lash on me. It became very disturbed once saw me, trying to push me out but it was like child pushing on a land raider and I managed to dispel this thing very easily. Mind of that person was still held captive by power much greater. I could see dark blob of void stretched on horizon, casting its chilling, malicious darkness over light of his soul. It wasn't just held captive, but already assimilated, consumed. It was as . . . partially eaten and digested. Worst of all, no probing helped me to recognize its existence. It felt familiar, molded out of chaos power, but eerily calm . . . inert, inept, almost frozen, but didn't ignore me. I could feel its glance on me, but then . . . I felt much worse gazes from somewhere else. What was most intriguing, aetheric field was at large empty of predators. Normally you can feel dozens of damn parasites and astral vultures trying to feed on lost souls or you, but there . . . it was almost calm, like warp stilled in its presence.

In the end I couldn't access contents of his mind without attempt of fighting it and just by very large presence alone, it would be a lost cause anyway. When I came back sisters looked at me with wonder. My eyes glew with golden light due to astral travel and energies connected to it. Beatrice worried that my mutations may prove to be more baneful than helpful.

I couldn't get any information due to this . . . thing that latched onto him. Sister superior decided to kill him, making sure he won't become a gateway for warp entities and ordered to roll out his wheelchair. We went back to prisoner.

He seemed to be in very talkative mood even before I came in. One of sisters told me they managed to antagonize him when referencing failure of his cult. Ambition was a viable angle of approach. Once sisters setup session recording, I



entered through main door. This guy had a presence. Cuffed in chains and tortured almost to death, but still held strong. Despite lack of teeth, managed to speak understandable words.

Tried to spit on me with blood, but was surprised to see it freeze in air. It ended up on him. How glad was he for someone who knew how to use gifts of the dark gods, assuming Slaanesh "blessed" me with power. He was overjoyed to throw names at me, while praising my alleged devotion to chaos. It was obvious to him I HAD to be, as there was no other way I would have looked so good.

We talked for few minutes and he was very clever in using his words. Up to very suspicious point. During boasting about his creation, I used my powers to pin him onto the wall, almost squashing his flesh on it. I felt something was inside and immediately dove in. There was the same baleful presence I felt at palace, when it attacked Janna. This . . . cloud of malefic visions and wailing screams got scared and immediately backed out. This time I chased it through time and space. It was just a fraction of second but still enough to trace its place a bit further. From point in orbit from last time, it came from neighboring star system Radix Obec, but then . . . it broke off again. Once it escaped, prisoner flopped down on chains. Now as empty shell, animated by something or someone no more, giving me an idea what was going on.

I informed Frederick of my vision and we need to contact Huges at once. Beatrice led us out of dungeon to their commanding complex. From there, commissars talked to prepare three frigates for immediate departure. Once sisters finished report protocol, we bid farewells and left. But as we were about to walk out, Betty asked if we were going to chase cultists, and eventually if we needed help. Actually even not "if", she just declared that they are going to help "best they can".

I looked at Frederick. He said that sisterhood is very eager to help due to thing that happened at broadcasting center. Their fighting conduct would be great help. Especially from witch hunters. Commissar told her to wait for contact and we went back to palace.

In meantime, Admiral Kwintet called us to inform they would have troubles making my request available at short notice, so I told him we will take anything which was readily available. There would be Dauntless light cruiser waiting for us at Starport Alpha in the evening.

After my preparation, there was still time for departure so I called Abrax to ask about what they discovered in tunnels under palace. The described ancient mag-lev train system spanning whole continent. In fact so spacious, even his sensor drones had trouble mapping every corner and only about 4 000 miles have been discovered. There were few cave-ins but due to sturdy construction, and relative lack of tectonic movement, tunnels were ready to use but there was no sign of trains. According to him, building one would take a month, but I didn't want to build any, being more interested in uncanny discoveries. Instructed to notify me if he found something which is connected to our "special investigation". Maroo would supply troops if he needed any.

When I finished, it was already time for departure. My command squad assembled at main landing pad, from which we departed in Valkyrie for space port. Frederick took this time to talk to various personnel on ground. He left all his duties with colonel Heshir, our commanding staff officer in Central Command.



We had surprisingly few generals on planet. Just four. One of them, Manatus vel Nerod was already a separatist. Jali Lerr has been assassinated by poisoning, Hieronymus Laketterning at Bergen main training facility and Ezekiel Karnak in Olman fields. From what I heard, managing army has been a thorn in his side. Maroo didn't seem to have time to help him out due to all official duties I put him to. We had severe lack of experienced people.

We managed to fly directly into Cruiser's hangar bay. Dauntless isn't Defiant but still, they had a sizable fleet of transports. As soon as we touched down, Commodore Marubo Hirito, astropath Hugo, 1st officer Caroline Bread and few platoons of men already waited for us. After all greet and met was done, they escorted us to captain's quarters for a chat. Few minutes later, detachment of Sisters of Battle arrived as well with palatine Selesia in command.

It was very . . . lengthy. I tried not to upset our voidsmen with my usual self and put up my official mode of behavior. Fortunately Olsmo and Mastaf were happy to take over. For a time, officers didn't seem to be bothered by my presence. Not like I cared. Sister Selesia did. It looked like she wanted to cut into their chatter but held back. It was perplexing to her that governor was sitting there . . . doing and saying nothing while my officers run so loud. Well . . . I just delicately suggested that I wasn't a governor for long anyway. And effectively, it was Maroo who did act like one. Hirito became intrigued by very uncanny relationship between me and my men. Most notably how I did not keep them on a leash. Wanted to know more about my reasons. Frederick spoke for me. Perhaps for better, since I didn't know which officers were in loop. After tea party ended, guides took us to our rooms.

Sisters didn't mind living in navy quarters. Navy people did mind Sororitas living in their quarters. From what I heard, they were . . . bossy, having a very different, very strict religious conduct when it came to service to the Emperor. People on ship, well . . . it was a bit loose for sisters' taste. It was just 80 sisters but it struck fear of Emperor into them more than a commissar would. Even if they walk around with bolters, power armor and chainswords around, they were valiant devotees. And now it was two long weeks before we returned.

To kill my time, I went through navy records, fleets, commanders, stations, patrol routes, dispatches, alarms and recent civil conflict. Access to High Command Database and war room council planning allowed me see everything in real time. Almost.

This place we were heading, had promethium fuel plant with which contact had been lost almost solar month ago. Due to its location, it was completely out of way of any visited place, and thus not patrolled. Not even sloops. It was important promethium plant, supplying about 10% of whole demand. Administration and logistic department didn't care. Corporation which owned that refinery sent ship to find out what was happening, but it never returned. No message ever came back. Incapable of salvaging any insurance plan, they decided to sell it. Still, it was three whole freighters of promethium every day that's gone missing, just before war.



— Arrival Day [88_] — Pursuit day [74_] — Day of reign [42_] —

During travel, my men had ample opportunities to hone their fighting skills against Sororitas. Sister Selesia managed to “convince” captain to implement new training regime for his men. Each sister would be delegated to train almost two companies every day. Fortunately it was just a week. From messages we received from Mara, nothing major happened, Kwintet found two people whom he promoted to rear admirals, managed to prepare fleet for our departure to mining colonies and general Karnak finally took back Olman City. From predictions Maroo sent, in about a month we could return to normalize planetary food supply.



Journey was supposed to last only 6,5 days, but something threw us off the course. After 9 days we emerged from the warp near outer planet. Radix Obec is a very old star with two planets and on planetoid. Nearly 70 light years from nearest military outpost, it was truly fringes of subsector. Western rim of galactic void was so well visible outside system. There were so few stars I couldn't



imagine void being this empty. On the other side, 80 000 light years of glittering stars. For moment I could just sit in front of windows and look at how beautiful is our galaxy. And then memories of all afflictions and abominations returned to my mindz, effectively reminding me of sickness digesting it nobody could ever cure. And the nasty scar of Eye of Terror.

I was called to the bridge as we ate our breakfast. It finally started.

Gathering of high profile personnel. Main Astropath, captain, commissar Kristina and Frederick, me, techpriest REBIIS and commodore looked at preliminary scanning of surrounding space. Auger sensors reached little over 3 AU, enough to scan whole system. Bothersome report of Hugo, who told us he had to take roundabout way due to something hiding within system had techpriests search any disturbance in time-sapce. Multi spectroscope displayed everything in normal conditions. Auspex did not detect anything out of normal. Layered wavelength device was also still. Any deviations were all in normal reading parameters. Machine spirit was very calm. Still, Hugo was very adamant he felt something diabolical within warp. This needed a bit of disclosure. With acceptance of Selesia, I told them few things about nature of separatists, without pointing to how we gathered this knowledge. It wasn't a surprise for Hugo to know what I was capable of. If anything, he seemed glad I was using my power to such extent. 1st officer was opposite in this assumption. Lady Bread was actually a sister of one astropaths serving aboard freighter fleet and knew dangers psykers could wreck upon world and was very suspicious of how did I manage to feel this presence within warp from such great distance. After such remark Hugo started to doubt as well. With dose of holding back, she suggested that it was strange my eyes weren't wiped with ritual of binding. More over, they shone a light. All those points had their merit, but I only told her, she shall know me by my fruits, not by my words.

Once atmosphere calmed down, Frederick proceeded to plan out our approach. Radix Obec II is a very weird planet. It is enormous, almost 7 standard sizes bigger than Terra. Atmosphere is 20 miles thick with pressures reaching 4 times human tolerance and gravity almost 6 times the standard. Only servitors and exosuit workers could comfortably navigate on the surface.

Its most valuable resource however, were methane seas and diamond beaches. Atmosphere toxic for humans and equipment, yet it was perfect resource for refining promethium in unlimited quantities for dirt cheap. Quite literary. Micro diamonds were used in creation of glassy alloy compound strong enough to be used in local complex development. It served as first line of defense against corrosive winds. Extractor devices located at shores could operate in extreme conditions. Refinery itself stationed above planet, in high orbit.

On our approach we managed to connect to station's communications. Automated alarm rang on all open channels. Mechanized voice of servitor repeated station is under xenos attack. When we got closer to planet, we caught on optic sensors silhouette of passenger ferry. This one was locally produced Mewa variant, smallest warp capable supply ship in fleet. Maybe 300 meter long. It didn't respond to hail. Not even automated alarm. We knew it was a bad thing and had to be checked. Getting closer, optic scanners could finally make out scorched bulkheads and sizable holes melted in starboard. We anchored Old Valor 50 kilometers away and prepared boarding team. My boys were ichy twitchy to gear up. Frederick decided they can go.



40 minutes later, 100 soldiers and 20 sisters boarder transports. I was in Valkyrie with Selesia and dominion squad. Frederick decided to stay on bridge. My men were given teams of their own. Frederick gave me code name "Blue" for easy communication during operations.

The closer we were, the more I felt this . . . very uneasy and dark feeling. A regret? Deep regret of not doing something? A residue energy from victims' last moments.

Our pilots reported vast signs of melted armor and pierced walls. My team dropped off at one of such holes. Lack of gravity helped me to jump out and just fly to the destination. It was also first time those people saw me using my abilities outside combat conditions. Selesia couldn't believe her eyes when I flew around without any jetpack. It is actually easy when you know the technique. Most of all, I was able to bend out some of the plates and girders to make room for assault team, throw them one of steel ropes used to secure bulk containers in cargo bay, so they could easily come aboard.

Cargo floated all around in complete darkness, some of it destroyed and deformed by strong, lance weaponry. Whatever pierced through outer shell, evaporated a sizable hole inside corridors, partially destroying main construction spine, leaving giant hole connecting two compartments on its side. That wasn't the worst however. Other teams reported people torn to pieces and floating corpses with blood splattered on floor as they were dragged in dining hall. In total, 63 bodies sighted.

We tried moving to main bridge. Doors and machinery were dead. I had to open them by force. On our way up, we saw sporadic signs of fight. Crew, now cut in few pieces, used las weaponry to shoot something or someone. It didn't go well.

Blast doors of bridge might have been shut, but weren't anything tough to crack for my power. It's tormented cogs reverberated within superstructure so much, Mastaf raised alarm. Sisters explained it to our troops.

Floodlights illuminated icy cones of dust floating inside. Crew of 22 people floated above deck. Some of them still sitting in their chairs. Few already drifted out of broken windows. Lingering emotion of despair baked itself inside. Team November from engineering reported severe damage to engine power coupling. REBIIS instructed them what to do through comms. Other teams reported few more bodies found in what looked like defensive choke points.

While Sororitas investigated room, I prepared to dive into collective memory of this place by putting my feet firmly of the deck, closing eyes to cut off visual feed and focus. Lingering emotions were so strong it only took few seconds before I begun to fall deep into feelings of despair. At first, sporadic visions of fighting. A bit further I heard voices of people reporting Eldar guardians invading ship. Communication via vox system of engineers about multiple failures of main drive. Then voices calmed down. Someone was whispering to everyone that they will survive, come back home. I heard captain's name and his authentication pass code followed by shouts of despair. Once ship lost power they could not seal the bridge properly with blast protection. Few moments later, lance weapon blew hole in front windows, venting out whole bridge. Drukhari took all left alive. And then I felt this dark presence once again. It was watching whole situation from somewhere close. This time, its energy signature was very vivid, crisp and almost fresh. I could feel it like heat of my own body. It was just echo so I couldn't give



chase, but it assured me this thing was here.

I came back to sisters gathered around me, waiting in silence, guarding me on my mind journey. Once I started to move again, Selesia asked me about things I searched for. They weren't thrilled to hear about Drukhari.

She informed Commodore about situation and we decided to leave for now to focus on promethium plant. Frederick ordered immediate extraction. On our way back, immeasurably strong attraction to this space station erupted within me. Infallible magnetic attraction. Like . . . I just had to go there. It wasn't just calling me, but captivating. Like acid burning in my mind, there was no getting rid of it. I shared this with Frederick on closed channel, which he consulted with astropath. Hugo had similar feeling of something calling him out. We all agreed it was very bad omen but decided to go there nonetheless. Captain kept everything cool and as stealthy as possible, cut off any unneeded communications and energy signatures.

After we returned, I needed time alone to meditate, spending all three hours of our journey contemplating, trying to reach out to the station via astral travel, but it had strong black shell surrounding it. I didn't try to penetrate not knowing what could be inside and returned.

Once close enough to see station via optic array, I was urgently called by bridge to take a look at it. We knew immediately it was going to get ugly. Drukhari cruiser was currently docked in one of its three piers. I raised red alarm and all hands to battle station. Frederick protested, saying it was too soon and ship wide alarm would only alarm Eldar as well. By such strong psychic guidance, I suspected they already knew we were here due to my poking around in warp. 1st officer was eager to sound alarm. Type of girl who liked to be prepared for anything. We put engines to maximum burn and begun to charge ahead, making sure to catch enemy with their pants down.

At distance of about 25 000 kilometers Drukhari took off, jumping into warp dangerously close to station. I advised commodore to look out on our flanks and instructed him how Drukhari ships fight lone vessels. For time being, they really disappeared. With red alarm, our shock troops already assembled in hangar. I waited with Selesia in Valkyrie for take off. Even though I felt their ship disappear, malefic presence was still residing around, ensuring me they will reappear.

We headed straight for refinery. Everyone on their toes. And then, I felt dark shadow trail stretching behind ship and immediately shouted to comms to make evasive maneuvers for incoming cruiser, but before we could make any, two lance shots landed on our void shield. Cruiser made acute and tight turn, engaging its holographic camouflage. Our batteries couldn't keep up, missing most of time.

Moment later, another two shots came from port side. Someone in office lounge was getting nervous on the comms. I ordered to make haste for station and use it as shield on one side. Knowing our Valkyrie assault would be futile, I run to teleportarium. It was just a matter of time before we were torn to pieces. And if they came to board us . . . well, you just can imagine the outcome.

Our macro batteries hit target sporadically but nothing major occurred. They just kept on flying around, shooting occasional snapshot at us, missing only few times. After an hour, our voidshields were taken down and first lance hit starboard.



It was moment I waited for. Everyone though I lost my mind when I ordered all storm troopers to stay and defend ship. Not even Frederick believed in my strength this much, shouting into comms his most vociferous, but inoffensive curses at me. But alas, as soon as first raiders appeared on our ship, I ordered techpriests to teleport me to Drukhari cruiser.



A: Oh, believe me, I did dumber shit than that.

A: Let's just say it wasn't my first time boarding such place alone.

A: You ever seen space hulk from the inside? You know how big it is? You know how hard it is to get off that shit once you are in? You ever cleansed Basilica of Torment?

A: Yeah, and don't forget warp spawned thingys.

I felt very very stupid, regretting my decision, as soon as stepped on the teleport pad. Checked if all my gear was in place, said few last words to Commodore and then techpriests hit the switch.



Blinding light filled my mind. This brief moment of inertia of consciousness always feels like loosing myself in the aether. Stars shine with unbelievable brightness, stretching in infinity over rainbow eternity, just to have this light turn into physical shapes on the other side.

I ended up inside slave pits. Guardian who watched over cells didn't know what to do. People inside cell begun to cry and shout. He opened his mouth to say something but froze in place. Only his eyes scanned me from every direction. I told him in Eldar to be quiet but he shouted "intrusion". Suddenly everyone in chamber became alive.

Before he could do anything I grabbed his brain and squashed it, but as he fell to ground, ten more run out of entrance. Good thing this cabal used normal, like Drukhari can have "normal" things anyway, bars made of wraithbone which make excellent projectiles. Razor blade pieces slashed them with ease, but not before calling reinforcements.

I have been to Eldar ships many times. I know how they build and plan them. Fortunately for me, this ship was very old variant indeed. Older than Imperium itself. Its wraithbone grayed out due time. Ancestor's spirit sucked out by ravenous thirst of Drukhari made its walls fairly brittle compared to a healthy one.

As much I desired to help people in pens, time pressed to move towards engines. Resistance encountered was ten times what I anticipated, hoping decks would be emptied due to raiding strike. My communication device didn't respond and there was no way to inform commissar of my plan. Well . . . shit happens. A lot. Especially in momentarily lapse in judgment.

As much as I didn't have problems with kabalite warriors, the Flayers made it helluva difficult, locking onto them with my abilities was a hit or miss. In the end, I managed to kill only few before they decided I was not worth effort and left shooting to agents.

Somewhere half way to my objective, dozens of heavy weapon barred my way out corridor. I begun to feel some itching in my hands. For better or worse, presence of dark Eldar dying souls . . . helped to prologue my use of powers. At this time whole ship was hunting me. Even dracon yelled his lungs out from top of fire prism. This unending barrage of heavy ordnance distracted me, consuming most of my attention to upkeep it. As it was not enough, it seemed as macrocannons were hitting their target, quaking ship.

Little cover I had could not help me. Instead of pushing, it was better to withdraw and search for another way. Powering through would cost me too much energy. From yelling and screams of their officers, it was almost sweetly obvious, how they frantically tried to search for effective tactic. I had to move quickly if I didn't want to be dragged into their emergency escape jump.

Whoever tried to chase me, did it with dose of distance. Trail of bodies torn apart filling vast floor with their rotten blood made them realize they stood no chances in close combat. Though I might not be as nimble as incubus, my psychic grip is enough to just shove them into a bucket at industrial rate, despite their warp and psychic artifact fuckery. Believe me, cabal didn't hold back. Fortunately, Dark Eldar don't use psychic powers, which helped me in hiding.

After few minutes of running towards bridge it all became . . . quiet. Very quiet. Only some shouts and curses in distant shafts. A good moment to catch my



breath I thought. Ehhhhhhh . . . like there is a good moment on Drukhari slave barge. I knew battle was still going on when ship got hit by our weapons. It was very heavy to breathe in helmet so I took it off. Oxygen rich atmosphere of Eldar ship made it easy. That's when Mandrake caught me off guard, walking out of shadows of the shrine, but he didn't attack. Can't even say how long did he wait in the shadows for appropriate moment to strike but once he saw my eyes . . . he stayed his blade. I managed to put barrier between us, but it didn't seem to matter for him. He just slowly blended back into gray darkness whispering into wind "good luck, morning star" in voice cold and withering, chilling my bones like whispers of death. As cut of a knife, surroundings filled with sound of chaos happening everywhere else. This bubble created by mandrake faded away, astonishing me with how lucky I was. For a Mandrake it wouldn't be harder than drawing breath to kill me during this carelessness.

Didn't wait for anything else to happen. Carefully but hastily, I moved forward, though web of swirly corridors. Like cavity of bone marrow, wraithbone engulfed whole construction within. Walls decorated with blue, flameless torches and sculptures of razor blades in hands of ancient warriors. Normal Eldar called this place halls of remembrance. Usually place where soulstones are safeguarded until reaching craftworld but this . . . it was sacrificial altar for Slaanesh. All art desecrated by blood and iconoclasm of extremism. Old gods replaced by statues of unspeakable horrors. Some of them felt like alive. And stank of chaos energy.

Even before I took one step inside, familiar dark presence touched me with its energy. The very thing which I came to hunt down . . . but that, later.

Carefully leaning my head outside corner and straining my hearing to its peak, I moved under walls, trying not to make any noise, but those damn boots, man . . . those damn boots, they weren't stealthy. It was bad enough just being on ship. It was even worse to be left alone, ignored, especially after bloodbath I left behind. But there . . . there I was observed and played with by unseen force. Force I couldn't recognize or feel. Something that couldn't be pinpointed even by focusing into the warp. In the end, my legs led me out of the maze, but mind still couldn't shake it off.

Chamber I found was huge. Multiple terraces surround it on various levels. Main . . . shrine, although it wasn't shire anymore, tall as ceiling, connected bottom with top by spiral stair slope. In this half darkness, I could not make out its end. What looked like ceremonial square was now filled to brim with dismembered corpses. Black blood stained most of floor in greater or smaller patches. There were only three exits I saw. The one I came in, transitory to opposite side of vessel and central, leading directly to command segments.

Upper level walkways and catwalks ended Emperor one knows where and when. I couldn't not make out most of room. And for first time in few centuries I became stress. Lost on hostile ship, with a pupil of one thousand eyes gazing at me in this unholy place. The only way out was to teleport myself out of there. Or throw myself out of airlock . . . This could only be done from webway gates usually located near Commandery, yet for time being I was half ship away from it. Anxiety started to take over. I had to run. I had to make it there fast, before any of ships was destroyed. So I run like a wind. As soon as I did, sharp like shard of ice, cold and windy voice whispered to me its "disappointment in my idiocy". Like a frigid fog, it crept into my thoughts, almost leaving a . . . frostbite on my mind. Once it tasted my emotions, erupted into hellish laughter.



All corpses reanimated at once. Two Talos contraptions dropped from darkness of ceiling just to chase me. Main gate begun to close. But I wasn't stopping. With tremendous thunder, I blasted damn door into dust by warp blast. Echo within chamber rung as white noise, reverberating through superstructure. It didn't matter what else was destroyed or who else did it alarm. Objective for me was clear – get the hell out of there in one piece.

This motivation helped to razor focus my powers. Suddenly no expenditure was big enough anymore. I felt how my body started to ache during butchering through hordes of Drukhari. Thousands of blades used by those brutes made excellent swarm of twirling blades. I ripped loose parts of armor, spikes, daggers, metal shards and all to form a swarming shell around. It couldn't defend me from big weapons but worked wonders against anyone stupid enough to come close.

Even though I run forward with all my might and closed distance to web gate, pain engines weren't much behind. Again, this voice in my head just sat in the back of my head, chanting out things in language I didn't understand, fogging my perception. Two times almost fading my consciousness.

Few more seconds and web gate would be mine. All operators were scared off, any warrior fled, everyone vacated portal room. Up to my disappointment, coordinates on consolettes weren't directed for our ship. It took few precious seconds to adjust. Few too much.

One machine flew in like wind and didn't even flinch in tight turn. Its bladed arms already prepared to flay me alive. Very presence of those things signify many bad implications for whole world. I already had encounter with those creations before, but never 1vs2 battle on hostile ship. While under fire.

A: Pain engine is a contraption created by Haemonculi. Enough said.

A: For more explicit description of horrific death it inflicts upon any poor fucker it grabs in its hands, consult your inquisitorial data repository.

I had to move or risk destroying portal. Fortunately they weren't as fast as I remembered. By putting my shield up, I invited them to use all sorts of planar devices for softening souls of their victims. It worked well enough to make them wobble in confusion. Another set of kabal warriors run out on upper segments to flood me with shuriken cannons. Volley of aetheric darts from Talos broke through, piercing armor and tearing multiple small wounds on my arm and right side. This effectively reminded me which world is real. While one of them tried to break through my shield I could finally grab it and rip apart. For reasons unknown, second flew away, leaving me alone with fire teams.

Whatever combatants were shooting, they didn't seem to be serious enough to even aim. Storm of fire unleashed was only half accurate, but the only thing on my mind was getting out of there in express mode. I grabbed navigation crystal and directed its energy in other webway. Few shots damaged console, but webgate remained open. Using parts of pain engine as projectiles to slash at attackers resulted in thinning out most of them, scattering everybody else. This allowed me to have some breathing room and quickly run towards portal. When I was near gate, all it took was switching on few crystals on few consoles which could be



done remotely with telekinesis.

Rift of dark void started to shimmer in blue, crystalline light, bringing me relief. Shouts and yells came closer and closer, reminding me there wasn't time to loose, but it took few long seconds until gate finally locked in its frequency zero-time lock. Not a moment too soon, haze of cosmic, dark pit crystallized out into clear, stable portal through which I could see foggy space of Old Valor on the other side. But . . . before I stepped in . . . I felt a sudden familiar presence behind me. Even though screams were getting louder, I still turned around, almost like on demand.

And there she stood . . . basking in awe of brilliant gold light, on the high ground of commander's deck, leaning against railings . . . someone looking like Ada . . . Her long hair untied in perfectly brushed coat of golden luster with golden eyes shimmering with desire. Red lips emanating with lust, and . . . her . . . pointy ears . . . spiking out through thick veil of hair . . . immaculate, luscious body clad in succubi armor, gently swaying hips for me, inviting to come closer. Her voice resounded in crystalline harmonic in my ears. And . . . I was stunned. And angry. And overtaken. And helpless to reject . . . But I could see that it wasn't my Ada. Soul residing within kept on withering. Grayish, smoky cloud reminding fog, not light.

Even so . . . I felt this Wych to be superior copy of A1. Or . . . the original template . . . And I didn't know which way was worse . . . Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh, for fuck's sake . . .

I . . . stood there. In front of portal, gazing at her for . . . don't know how long. It felt too little, too short anyway. She was so captivating that even group of gladiatrixes charging at me didn't incite any need of reaction. Even icy touch of dark voice in my head gone dry and distant.

Had it not been for . . . well, I was pulled into portal by big, black claw which didn't ask for permission. If not, there would be only stripes and pieces left of me. I couldn't move . . . her sight was just so damn magnificent . . . and terribly mesmerizing . . . Just as Drukhari only can.

Whatever. After moment of blacking out in hellish cold, I ended up inside main hangar bay of Old Valor, being thrown with impetus against lander shuttle, breaking few bones in rib cage, fracturing right temple and few panelings on the entry hatch. For a moment, my vision blurred as I slowly came to senses. When my consciousness returned to normal, two sister hospitaler already knelt above me. I heard dull noises in background of big commotion. Someone was shooting large amounts of slug bullets. I saw bluish hue of Eldar lance rifles. Returning to my full capacity took me a while. Once I understood words again, warrant officer of 78th platoon told me about ongoing boarding action of Drukhari. In a moment, another commissar led charge into hangar via stern gate. Too bad most of people died in shuriken fire. Frederick tried to contact me to get approximate sitrep. After sister injected me with stimulants, I was able to respond to him, stating there was still some power left in me.

And not a moment too soon. Kabalists managed to push armsmen out of hangar, creating a foothold. Sisters applied a chemshot of painkillers and got me up. I caught up with commissar Kristina to coordinate attack. After my shield was up, we run into open to draw fire, while soldiers flooded enemy with torrent of slugs.



Unfortunately, due to my exaggerated use power at raider barge I couldn't hold more than a minute, after which there was no more juice left. Commissar saw how my strength waned at the end, so she followed me with all out attack on intruders with grenades and rockets. It allowed me to take a good look at attacking forces for first time. Almost seven squads of agents and four wyses. No signs of webgate rift of reinforcements. They held frontal portion of hangar as well as supply passages. For time being, holding on to my defense system was all I could afford.

Commissar was thoughtful enough to grab me back into cover once my shield run out. I suppose exhaustion was written all over my face. Damage on my body was . . . minimal due to presence of available soul essence of tons of dead people and Eldar. Yet I needed long rest before summoning anything powerful. Kristina informed Frederick of my situation, shouting in meantime mean things to arms men through vox. You know, the way in which exemplary execution was closely luring on the horizon if they didn't aim better.

I sat behind cover for minute to catch breath and picked up slug rifle from dead body near me. Even though my shots hit target, Drukhari armor is capable of withstanding it without much problem. It wasn't until 10 mm machine guns were brought in those damn fuckers started to duck behind cover and thug of war finally tilted to our advantage.

Few minutes of rest allowed me to recuperate enough strength to send a voidblast right in the middle of enemy formation, splattering their remains on every wall. Unfortunately, large portion of hangar and its content became unusable. Shrockwave and splinters from my . . . destruction, scattered across whole hangar. Transports sustained only superficial damage, however crew suffered shrapnel wounds. 14 voidsmen died because of it. Navigators begged via vox channels to stay my hand and not disturb rivers of warp anymore. This big, black shadow was already gnawing at them and my show of force only ruse it up more. Well . . . they were in luck because all my strength was almost gone. So much that I couldn't even walk for a moment. Wyses moved with wild quickness, evading all damage. Remaining warriors yelled for reinforcements but they were left alone to suffer through barrage of grenades.

Once situation in hangar was under control, Kristina led any remaining force further in pursuit of attackers. Indebted workers begun to collect bodies right after everyone left. One of sisters stayed to take a look at my wounds. Together with four guardsmen, they escorted me to apothecarium.

I remember chaotic exchange of comms, captain shouting to his officers something. Frederick trying to coordinate defense with Kristina and even master gunner complaining about lack of people on stations.

Once chief surgeon put me in medical bay I was left alone for a while. There is no way to explain what went through my head. All my attention was still fixated upon . . . person that I saw . . . How could she appear right at that moment . . . what were other explanations . . . and so on . . . I closed my eyes to think and before anyone came check on me, I fell asleep.



— Arrival Day [89_] — Pursuit day [75_] — Day of reign [43_] —

It was quiet when I woke up. My rib cage wrapped in bandages and stiffened with plaster. It was very hard getting up. Painful.

Nurse informed me that battle ended few hours before. 1st officer left a report for me if I wanted to check it out. She called chief surgeon. Biologis Batus Lerman spoke about my . . . unusual healing capabilities. I just told him it was one of my powers. He was fascinated to see how psychic powers mutated living tissue to become beneficial “gifts”, raving on about how many times he heard stories about horrors spawned from immaterium. Fortunately, he needed to attend to other patients, cause boy oh boy, was he the talkative type.

As they walked out of medical room, Mastaf with three other guards came in to report for duty. I was somewhat relieved to know he survived. Not a moment later, I heard Kimbly trash talking to nurses on duty. Ughhhhhh . . . that guy never changed. But I was too glad to see him to give a proper scolding. He brought me a dinner after all.

I was told about what happened during eating. Frederick even managed to prepare concise report which could be viewed on my PDA.

8 hours earlier, enemy ship designated DRC-M41/1-6-5-9-9 escaped into the warp after sustaining serious damage, after almost 6 hours of battle. We managed to chunk few big holes in its hull but it was too fast to hit it with macro weapons. My . . . boarding attempt, to say so, slew down their firing rate by 83% for 48 minutes. Old valor sustained 2 destroyed turrets and mild destruction of outer plating on port side. As for time being, Drukhari boarding party was completely wiped out. Almost 400 in strength. Our ship suffered 3400 lost personnel. Most of them were indebted workers and servitors, but we still mourned them. Especially when I remember how those servitors were made in first place. That should be mourned in the first place.

Except for ordinary, superficial destruction of Eldar weaponry inside, vessel remained capable of further patrol. Kimbly, insatiably curious what happened to my lightning strike asked multitude of questions, trying not to overstep his position. I guessed not only him, but I preferred not to talk about it in the open.

Mastaf informed me about ongoing surveying effort inside refinery. Every able guardsmen has been transported to make sure nothing is nested inside. Frederick led the effort. Logistics teams resupplied whatever we could from plant and made hastily repairs of everything that could be repaired.

After reporting latest news, they left me alone to rest up. I still couldn't get used to this “my lord” thing. Once I was alone, locked door and finally could estimate damage on myself, but it . . . there was little to none whatsoever. My hands, perhaps a little dried out, flaky skin, some pulsating heat within, but nothing major happened to them even after I used so much power.



A: Well . . . it's not set in stone that there has to be damage . . . just . . . this power has its cost. And almost all the time, I am the one who pays this cost . . .

A: Let's just say, I can . . . pay the bill for using this power at expense of certain group of souls. Usually dead.

Anyway. I was glad and sad at the same time. Laying on the bed felt very comfortable. Almost cozy. Great sea of souls overtook me and I looked outside, into the realms. Ravenous oceans of immaterium were calming down after the battle. Aaetheric parasites loitering around, waiting for opportunity to infest mortal beings. I shoed them away with ray of light, noticing disappearance of great and dark void previously lingering around refinery. I could not see it anymore and turned my gaze into ship. Navigators and astropaths were visibly shaken. Their light turbulent, like high seas. Chief navigator was also surveying surrounding space searching for intrusions. We "met" in our minds . . . you know. Georg couldn't believe that I didn't need psychic enhancements or equipment to dive into the warp so deeply and clearly. But most of all was astonished at . . . size of my presence in the warp. Couldn't pinpoint my location and couldn't feel center of my presence. To him I was like giant cloud of nebula traveling through space. And he saw something behind me, but before we could take it further, I cut off, bidding him good day - Commodore came to see me. We had a friendly chat about my . . . display of bravery? Nah . . .

He was very astonished I managed to survive. Even though everybody now saw what happened at Inner Eastern Gate of palace, nobody believed it was all real. Even when commissar Olsmo talked about it. Even when sisters of battle talked shared their witness. Not even when vids recorded it. According to him, there were many skeptic people in navy who didn't believe anything shown at infochannels, among which he was one of most ardent and wanted to offer his apologies. It felt very awkward. I am not used to listen about myself in such superlatives.

I asked him to prepare a report for Kwintet. There was also question of new names who appeared in high command. What people they were, if he ever known them, what experience they had, etc. And it appeared he knew those people very well. One of those people was his son in law, Batrolomeo Buaranotti. Once we shifted our talks towards new commanding officers, time flew very smoothly. He even admitted, in secret, he was a bit disappointed that it was Kwintet who became Admiral, since he thought he had better grasp of fleets in our entire sector. I promised him that if he manages to deliver results during this war, I would promote him to rear admiral. That got his attention and made him puff like a peacock. We ended our conversation with another visit of nurse.



— Arrival Day [90_] — Pursuit day [76_] — Day of reign [44_] —

I stayed in hospital until next day. My wounds and fractures mended enough to be able to walk around without any help. Mastaf was deployed on bridge, Kimbly trained soldiers and Ojik officers. Sister Superior led purging efforts.

Bridge reported full functionality of entire ship with exception of one turret which had to be serviced in shipyard. Frederick was already sending out messages to Mara and other fleets with new order plans.

Refinery was searched top to bottom. There were no signs of any life be it human or xeno, only ghoulish mutants, which to me definitely looked like Haemonculi experiments. Added limbs, half gutted and stitched with additions of horrific blades. Some of them with skin melted or removed, some missed half head and some even had their limbs removed entirely to be replaced with tentacles.

Scanners on planet did not detect anything. Landing teams did not find anything. Station's shift schedules showed no planet activity for few standard weeks, visited only for maintenance.

Once Selesia came back to report completion of full sweep of entire structure, we decided it would be better to move on towards ILU- 7. Another cleanup team would come with new workers to ensure safety.

4 hours later, we reached warp jump safe distance from star. To celebrate victory, high officers gathered in war room for small party. Each of commanders, including Selesia, wanted to know what happened to me during boarding attempt. All of them gathered for a lengthy tale of how I escaped through warp gate but. . . I didn't tell anyone about seeing . . . person who looked like Ada. 1st officer had a chill running down her spine when I described Haemoculi machines. REBIIS, who miraculously showed up, questioned me about those for half an hour.

Me, Mastaf and Frederick moved to my quarters to talk over how presence of Drukhari impacted significance of chaos cult and most important, we finally could connect some dots. I inferred, from all I seen on the ship, that von Rosette had a very peculiar help in setting up his empire. Even if there was no conclusive evidence outright admitting such allegiance, it was obvious to me and Frederick who this SIN person was.

They also had news for me. While I slept in medical bay, communication from Mara came in. Secured with Cosmic 3 clearance codes.

Maroo informed us that Amelia Alastor was found dead in dungeons of Villa Ophelia, belonging to noble house Malte, supporting von Rosette. From what he knew, she was sacrificed upon black altar to Slaanesh. Sisterhood already cleansed and sanctified place. Whole family was accused of heresy and is now wanted dead or alive by order of palatine Leonida, signed by Cardinal Constantine Krietlig.

Food supply was returning into the market as admiral Kwintet amassed strike force of 24 frigates to chase down Blacklight's guerrilla forces to their hideout in inter-sector space. Pirate forces were in recess, and their location, slowly but surely, revealed in near future.



Workforce for mines of de Estana was ready to depart next morning. We managed to rise almost 1 000 000 eager people with promises of better food rations. Battlefleet made sure to pave way for secure transition. Their escort consisted of Defiant light cruiser and three sword escorts. We would be additional firepower.

But there was a greater concern, like Orks rampaging around, who already managed to overtake Riktus Prime, flooding planet with hundreds of thousands. Pleasure world has been evacuated, leaving only Militarum on defense, resulting in lack of basic resources, which were still somewhat produced on planet. Commanding general decided it was better to cleanse planet from orbit and rebuild later. It was very unfortunate, outright dumb, but I couldn't do anything about it, only hoping they didn't level important infrastructure while waiting for resources.

Maroo had his hands full with sweeping whole system and we needed those few ships in the orbit. As of that time, starport over Reina was not to be attacked. Karnak gathered forces to push further west, to recapture mining corporations. I honestly admit I had high hopes for general, giving credit where credit is due. New recruitment brought him almost 1 500 000 soldiers under his command.

We overall managed to rise more conscripts than we had available weaponry. Frederick thought that it was too much already. We now had almost 11 000 000 soldiers, but only 1/5 could be equipped with any weapon. At the same time, Blacklight's mercenary forces begun to dwindle. It was only a matter of time before we could crush defense line of eastern plains. All of it, unfortunately, at the cost of equipment production. Most new people came from factories and small, local guilds, further decreasing manufacture capabilities.

Last, but not least, yet most disgusting, were reports of Blacklight rounding up entire villages or cities and moving them somewhere. All satellites capable of surveying those regions have been destroyed. They probably used underground maglev train system anyway. Already seeing how Drukhari nested around, I could only anticipate fate those those victims.

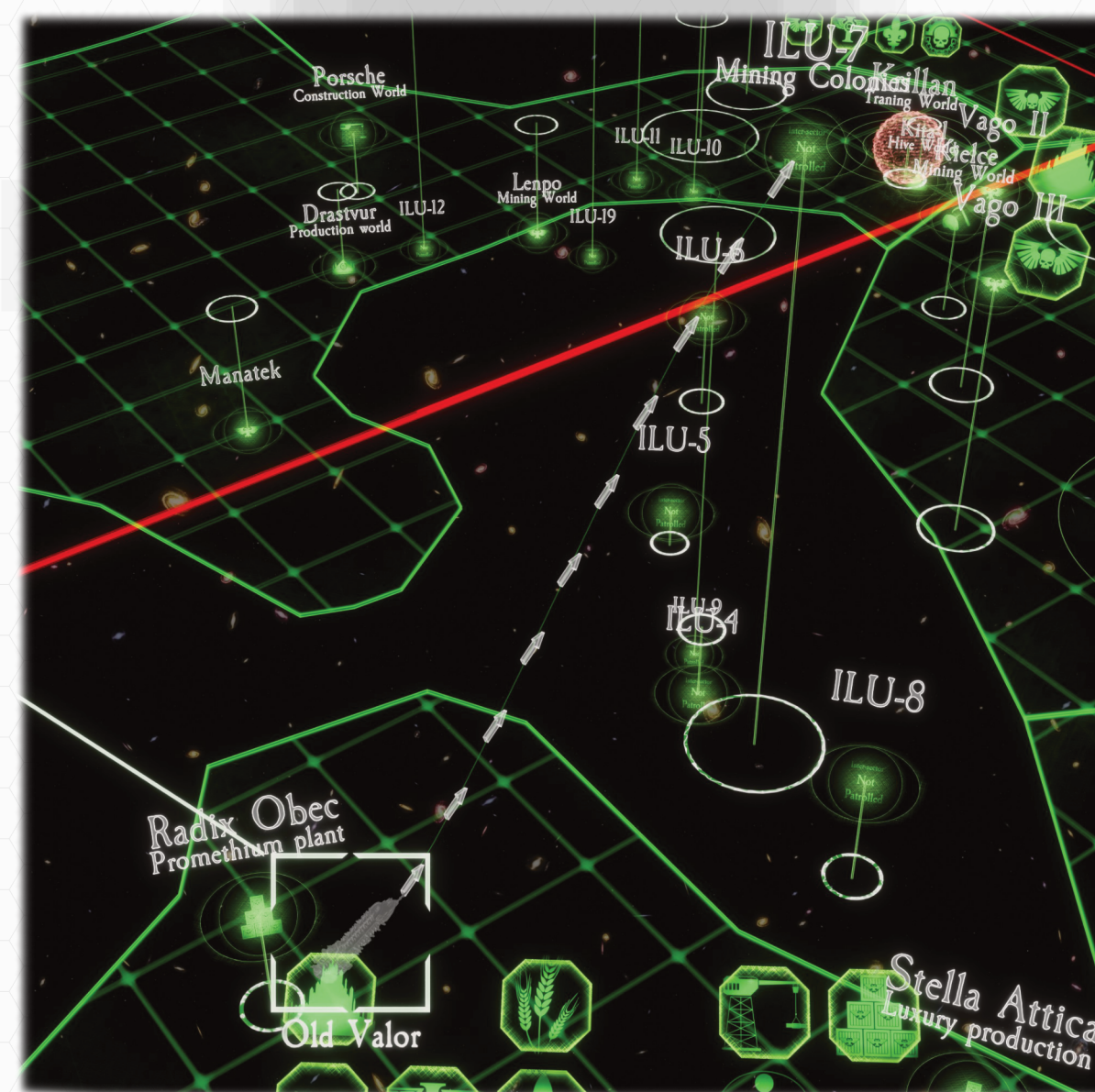
Listening to report on Mara, I begun to doubt validity of this mining expedition. Sure, in long run it enabled our government to produce and lease mass quantities of troops against Ork warbands, but at the same time, it looked like they would be used to pay tithe in first place. Unless we could return production to Lokinyth forgeworld.

Frederick also saw how planetary conquest would turn out, advising me to cancel building of new production facility and make deal with new fabricator for delivering resources. If we could secure steady supply of rare metals, it would be great trading card. We could requisition new equipment for imperial regiments outside queued schedule with quantities we actually needed for rising one regiment per quarter. Men were already conscripted, training was underway, proper accouterments were only thing missing.

It was a good idea, but I had my doubt if Archmagos would even entertain such proposition. They had fallen behind schedule for many worlds. It was 4 months of minimal production, which complicated things even more. And second, our agri world supplied food, not troops in first place, while sector's production directly supplied hundreds of worlds. Nothing is ever easy in Imperium.



Our journey however, was smooth. For next 10 days all we did was training. Sororitas put all facilities and even corridors to use. Frederick and Krisitna made sure everything went smooth. Gymnasiums were occupied all the time. Our men were in high spirits after last encounter. Loss of such great amount of crew only built up resolve of voidsmen.





— Arrival Day [99_] — Pursuit day [85_] — Day of reign [53_] —

We reached system ILU-7 one day prior to schedule, letting crew rest as we approached asteroid belt. We stationed ourselves in orbit of complex 3, the furthest outward. Preliminary scans indicated total silence and lack of any life. I didn't feel anything bad as well.

Boarding party sent to complex on reconnaissance mission reported quietness. Barren rock hosted no life and had no occupants. Not even bodies were found. No alarms. No security breaches. All servitors powered down and neatly lined up in maintenance rooms. Giant chambers of ore processing belts, crushing machines, smelters and cranes stood empty but fully functional. Techpriests were sent down to turn on machinery. They managed to fire up plasma generators before next day. . . .

Anyway, while techpriest were praying to slabs of steel, Mastaf and his squad managed to reach control room. Everything worked in perfect order. With auxiliary power on, they connected main console to satellite dish and restored communications. We could then peruse data repositories from ship's bridge.

First thing we saw in most recent video logs, was exodus of people from station. Not in a good way. 83 days earlier, something weird happened to minds of workers. They started to hear voices in their heads. Most of them became scared, demanding to be sent back, yet there was no scheduled transport for another 2 weeks. Shuttles on site weren't warp capable. Half of residents relocated to complex no. 2 in next 3 days. Whoever stayed behind had to be under ecclesiarchy surveillance all the time. Security forces were allowed to use extreme forces, if anything would happen. From remaining 9000 people, half was transported to complex 1. Only skeleton crew remained.

After 5 days of this phenomena, unrest begun pushing people to extremes. First acts of murder and violence. Over 100 homicides in two days. After 7th day, everything stops. Video footage shows how all people loose themselves and . . . stand in place. In one moment everyone moved like automatons to landing bay. Drukhari raiding barge took everyone without even as much as a shootout. We checked station's telemetry readings. Nothing outside norm. we couldn't get any information about warp activities.

Once mystery has been resolved, I ordered everyone back to the ship, setting out towards complex II, located at 7ILU-7-2. Everyone knew what we could expect there. The only uncertainty remaining was the scale of raid. Planet was a hefty chunk of ore. Big enough to have 0.8 gravity and even atmosphere, but not breathable. Toxic clouds of yellow, phosphorus storms covered most of planet. Very corrosive environment.

At first, commodore advised to wait for our convoy, scanning and listening. After 4 hours everyone was itching to get down there. In truth, so did I. Finally, preparation for planetfall begun.

Frederick made sure only elite units were sent with me. Mainly sororitas and storm troopers. Since skirmish inside hangar, we had 4 shuttles left. Capacity for 8 chimeras and 400 people. We didn't have transporters, unfortunately.

This time Frederick deployed with us. He had very negative opinion about



my leadership skills after my last trip. We set off at about 10 hour solar and performed check communication for 40 teams, staying in contact at all times. Commissar gave out orders to each platoon in case of emergency. I overlooked soldiers strapped into chairs on upper flight deck. Focused in anticipation of battle. I could feel their minds almost wishing it, to take revenge for what happened on ship.

Turbulent storm shocked hull for a minute, until it reached lower atmosphere. We saw mining complex via portholes on our left side. It was indeed vast. Whole mining city with a staging ground for orbital transporters. Even if we arrived 70 kilometers outside, this still was big enough to fill window. Wide transporting railroads shoot off into faraway horizon plains, with hundreds of trains lined up for ore processing. Tall spires and chimneys stood out over this lowrise building facility. Save for giant storing silos and transport freighter docked in port.

We didn't land outright but made a round around to spot best approach. Outside space port, there were three big patches of construction zone under mountain slopes, but it was the furthest from foreman chambers. From high altitude, we spotted obvious signs of fights. Targeting system in my new visor offered 64x optic zoom. With a bit of image processing via digital zoom, I was able to read inscriptions on plaques. Mastaf and Ojik were given similar gear. After quadrant of circling above complex no.2, all major points of interest were sighted and marked on HUD, biggest spots of combat clearly logged. Frederick coordinated all teams for landing on port's airstrip.

We scattered our approach. I have taken two squads to command center, four were designated to sweep freighter for survivors, and rest would venture into the complex to secure major objectives. Our Valkyries landed in middle of port.

Starship in docking bay bore clear scorching marks by fire and later by corroding rain. All alloy equipment had to be secured with layer of paint which made it look like already rusted. Dark brown all around. Windows had yellowish tint to them. Only stone from local ground was somewhat pristine. Data received from de Estana put this complex at 300 years old.

Team October separated to look into burned buildings. Our team, January, moved through ravaged upper platforms towards control tower. Deck was slightly damaged by laser shots and very sharp blades. Some walls displayed marks of melted and scorched stone. Some windows shattered inward.

There were no bodies, but visible marks of blood, mixing with acid stains on metallic, corroded floors. Auxiliary power was still on. Doors and gates worked but most of machinery didn't respond to input. From vast terraces of starport our soldiers noticed downed aircraft crash landed into one of the walls. Hefty fighter of almost 30 meter in length. Due to fog we weren't able to clearly see its designation, but it was 100% human made craft.

Decontamination checkpoint worked fine. It allowed us to enter without breaking out through windows. There we saw first signs of struggle. Body parts lied in all directions. Large halls of benches and seats were littered with equipment, bags, backpacks and briefcases abandoned during some kind of rush. Dead bodies hung on cables almost 20 meters high. One chandelier had 7 bodies tied to it. Bloody sweep of whatever happened here left many dismembered body



parts rotting in midst abandoned belongings. All levels of waiting platforms were packed to the brim with civilian gear. With no security forces clearly visible, only bullet and burnt holes provided visible destruction. Multiple broken windows let in toxic atmosphere, making everything dump with sulfuric acid. Plastics yellowed out, metals begun to corrode. Thousands of cases already browned out.

During our sweep . . . I found a bunny plushie toy under one of smaller bodies . . . reminding all of us what was at stake . . . knowing what this meant . . . all the kids in there . . . grim reality sunk into soldiers tagging with us. It made them even more furious and vengeful, so much that Frederick had to bring them into conduct.

As we moved slowly through departure halls, blood and combat damage of environment intensified. Occasional cut off limb or guts spilled on the floor. Whatever flowers grew in planters have already withered due to toxic air.

Gates from port to processing plant have been sealed shut. We saw through windows, that tunnels connecting port with administration building collapsed due to destruction of their supports. Team February informed us of still intact passage on the other side of staging halls and we rejoined them. During transition, I felt a faint psychic response coming further from center of silo resource management complex. I advised every other team via radio to expect mutants and warp things running around, which had sister superior remind me, delicately, not to disclose too much.

Once we passed through another decontamination chamber, atmosphere became breathable once again, but I forbade anyone to take off their helmets just yet. Ore processors and mining equipment was not damaged, at least not in visual way. Engineering team reported everything back to Old Valor via video feed in real time.

No signs of carnage in processing plants. Staff quarters were free of blood and gore with occasional signs of struggle between servitors and something, but whatever has transpired or whoever did it left machinery running, and by now, overheating. We had to manually cut off power feed from cables.

I led our teams with my inner compass. It seemed like this source of psychic response was located at staff quarters site no 4 which meant we had to go outside once more.

Giant diggers and humongous ore belts overlooked gaping hole in ground over excavation site. Almost mile deep, gold mine remained untouched, spiked with scaffolding catwalks, elevators, transport rails and cranes over processing machines. Dozens of giant tunnels were bored into its walls. Every tunnel had two transporting belts build into them. I don't know how wide was this hole, but I could say a transport ship could land inside. It really looked like 300 years of excavation.

Psychic signal was getting stronger. I felt it on the other side, in big living hub. Our long walk above massive dig site felt both superb and distressing. Magnificent mega constructions of Adeptus Mechanicus are always a sight to behold. Giant digger dwarfed everything in sight.

Our relaxation ended with reports of battle coming through vox. Two teams spotted horde of zombies in living quarters no.2 and proceeded to purge complex. Due to sheer size of living hubs, Frederick redirected 4 other teams to help out.

By the time we reached processing plant, team October managed to turn on



promethium generators. Massive floodlights illuminated city in grand display of white light. It became less creepy to walk during setting sun. But as luck would have it, thunderstorm came closer to complex no.II. Old Valor advised to not get caught outside. We all knew how dangerous corrosive hurricane can be.

As soon as decontamination process finished and we walked inside, faint sounds from depths caught our attention. Those were very quiet and impossible to understand with rain smashing over the walls. I suspected that the same thing which made those noises was my target. Psychic trail, although clarified, remained . . . somewhat diluted.

With everyone armed and ready, we begun to advance inside complex. No people present at their stations despite equipment looking like in usage just a mere moment ago. Food still on trays, drinks still in cups, no sign of fighting or even panic. We suspected that siren song did its job there as well.

Walkways past center processing routes headed towards meeting hall. We heard quiet and slow growling more and more. I already alarmed my men to be prepared for the worst and watch their backs while advising sisters through radio of our status.

Frederick stopped us from entering to discuss with me what did I feel inside, assuming I used my gifts to scout ahead. I told him there was only one source of disturbance but it was much bigger than normal human, without any complementary disturbances. Considering what happened in living complex, we prepared to open fire at drop of a hat. Commissar was not having it. He couldn't risk losing me, right after I did the most stupidest thing in the world just few days prior, giving order to quickly move out for 2 squads to reinforce us, delaying entry by 20 minutes. Our boys couldn't contain themselves while waiting for backup.

Teams proceeded in total quiet, in spooky clean atmosphere, but as soon as we entered theater area, we found blood splattered all over floors of arrival station. The closer to main hall, the more gore there was. At entrance only pieces of bodies, like fingers or arms, while on the exit to viewing area, whole melted bodies assimilated into ground floor. Mutilated and mutated into giant, organic gnarl of thousand limbs. Organic tissue was flowing like gel all over marble floors and red carpet. Golden chandeliers overtaken by blackened rust mixed with sludge. Frederick looked at me and then on our soldiers. They were all ready to run and gun. He put up his pistol in sign of readiness.

I opened main door. Shriek of pain and wailing suffering filled theater hall. In midst of corpses, upon a golden throne sat a . . . fucking thing resembling in vague shape a human. A human I . . . at least I think I knew. Ada.

Her . . . ITS body tied to large throne by belts and chains. Its human shape looked like stitched from many bodies. Skin of this . . . thing . . . was melting off like warm chockolate from donut. Part of its body already grown into seat. I almost let out a whisper of her name, when we heard one of soldiers weeping about his mother. Frederick instantly told him that this thing is not his mother, grabbed him by throat, reminding them where they are.

I however, instantly understood what this psychic signal meant. Whatever it looked like to our eyes, was just projected into our minds . . . image of people . . . we most cared about to deceive our senses. Although I wasn't sure if I cared about Ada so much.



Whatever the case, I assumed it was its defense due to hampered movement ability. Such heavy chains would tie down ogryn flat, while this . . . something grew out of this throne in the first place.

Before I allowed them to put it down in flames, I needed to dive into it's field to dispel this facade. You can imagine Olsmo wasn't remotely thrilled, but couldn't forbid me anything.

I sat in one of front chairs while Mastaf informed everyone what we found. Soldiers took firing positions on terraces and balcony waiting for order. Despite explicit, stone strong commissar commanding beside me, men exchanged woes in whispers among themselves until Frederick ordered silence. Except for howls and growls of this thing, there was complete silence. Once could hear electricity in cables. And my boots. Steel cuffs are handy but very unstealthy. I needed few minutes of preparation before, cooling my head off and clearing my mind before diving into it's memory.

And I saw Drukhari raiding complex through webgate portal opening at living quarters no.3. Hundreds of warriors and glimpses of elite units begun to massacre everyone. Then I saw big Eldar woman with many . . . arms. I couldn't see anything distinct. Everything was foggy, almost withering. I could only feel that she was full of dread and excitement, preparing something. And then this man was drown in pile of bodies. I felt excruciating pain of being burned alive, but . . . internally. His mind an body melted with others, here at the stage, into new being. Hideous and . . . mildly aware of its existence. This was the master astropath stationed on board Mortal Bend, one of ore freighters. His psychic abilities made him . . . his mind, survive in certain sense, whatever ritual was performed on him. I tried to reach out to . . . it, because there was no more person inside, to crush this field of influence it spread around.

My focus was torn by screams of one of our soldiers. I opened eyes to see what scared him so much. Momentarily, everyone gasp in disbelief. I felt fear in their hearts and scream of pain from monster's mind.

This thing sitting ion the throne . . . was now a giant pile of bodies melted and assimilated into each other. Its . . . head, if one could say so . . . looked like few rib cages opened up, stitched together and spiked with knife teeths. Dozens of arms or legs of . . . what was once humans, wiggled around. Chains tying it had already vanished under slumps of . . . blobby tissue, vaguely shaped into humanoid form. And big. Big like very old Ork nob. Like a dreadnought.

Frederick scowled men asking for orders. Guardsmen wanted to burn it as it stood. But I took pack of grenades and remote demo charge, shoved it down the . . . maw of this thing as far as I could, inciting it's writhes of pain. We made sure to stay clear of any possible tissue contamination, clearing auditorium, and we blew it up into thousand pieces. Aftershock wave cleared out most of main stage's construction. For few seconds there was blissful silence in hall. And in aether. To make sure it was dead, we checked it with Frederick.

To our disgust, some pieces still wriggled splattered under walls. This was time to use our flamers. Eight specialists would set ablaze whole theater in moment. I told our boys to spill some fuel on ground, to make sure this building would burn with everything inside. It might have been a poor partnership decision towards de Estana, but we had to make sure this thing was never - ever found. And stayed dead. Before taking action, teams evacuated and prepared to



cut off whole wing, shutting all emergency shutters. Once soldiers finished their work, main building of theater glowed like torch.

Other teams saw the fire and immediately asked what has transpired. Commodore shouted curses all over the place once he learnt what Drukhari made out of our people. It . . . made them hate alien races even more. I reminded them we are dealing with dark Eldar, not fluffy bunnies.

Further down, complex had more signs of combat, even more missing people and even more blood everywhere. But still . . . no bodies which could call whole. Mature or . . . small, every found corpse had something missing.

We reached command center hour later. During that time ground crew in processing plant encountered multiple ghoulish mutants. Main engineering complex saw most crippling resistance.

Security footage showed a very similar procedure to what happened at complex no.3, two days after workers from site 1 and 3 landed and processed people displayed first stage of weird behavior. Accidents started to pile up as machines as well as human implants begun to malfunction rapidly. Some workers experienced voice in their heads. Dramatic surge in psychosis of augmented humans rose, growing concerns over what was happening. Tech priests reported that machine spirits were in state of dormancy. Only servitors remained unaffected. Murders begun to erupt despite doubling size of security force. We saw how mine cart pushers would stop working, pick up wrench and start to pulverize other worker in battle frenzy. Almost week after new arrivals, riots erupted, demanding better treatment from head master. Strike of miners halted ore production. Two days later some people stopped . . . behaving like human and became docile, very . . . automata like. Vast swats of workforce would stop working all at once like with a switch of a button and just stand there. All of them were unresponsive even to wounds. Those just . . . fell to ground while others did nothing.

Foreman, Lord Giano de Estana decided to call for help. True extend of bizarre behavior was not disclosed except for strikes and riots. Same night brought Drukhari raiders onto world. It seemed like navigators couldn't establish connection to any patrol and were cut off even from warp transition channels.

Riots got bigger and bigger. Chaos raged supreme. Everybody panicked. Security forces weren't equipped to fight Eldar. I'd say one in four was killed. Rest . . . wished they were, once Drukhari tied them like cattle, caging population on their barge. Almost 6 hours later, when fighting was over, masses of those docile people would start to move like swarm and haul corpses down to barge, emptying whole place. Optix registered dracon leading the assault. I think it was the same as one I met.

Some people and corpses were stored at theater hall, but before we seen any Eldar approach, the feed was cut off in that segment.

Raider barge left. Once relief ship docked to port, they were raided as well.



— Arrival Day [100] — Pursuit day [86_] — Day of reign [54_] —

We spent 15 hours cleaning out complex to best of our abilities untill ammunition run out, after which we returned to orbit. During debriefing of officer cadre, we counted Total loss of 54 thousand dead people, over 215 thousand enslaved and near 7500 ghoulish zombies. Raiders did not take any supplies or didn't destroy from orbit any facility. Frederick played video recording from his helmet to better describe extent of damage of machinery. REBIIS concluded that all damage could be repaired in matter of weeks with workforce currently being en route.

Problem of another raid was seriously bad as this place was not build with defense measures in mind. If our fleet couldn't decimate pirates, it was meaningless to open facility again. We discussed matter of weird behavior, but sadly even I couldn't say for sure what happened, yet it was clear that something in dark Eldar ship could turn off humans via warp influence. The only way to make sure workers would be free from outside influence was to build planetary gellar field. Or at least local warp inhibitor, which would take 182 days. Various mining sites on planet would have to remain unopened.

And just as we were about to finish, our convoy safely arrived. Due to time constraints Frederick decided to meet up with them immediately to fill in into situation. Of course, Lord Captain Brjis of cruiser Jagged Cauldron and his retinue already waited for such opportunity.

We met with them on board our ship to discuss transfer of command and data. Decision was made to take Old Valor back to Mara as fast as possible while escorting ships would remain in defense for time being. Truth be told, I was really tired and not paid attention to meeting, almost falling asleep. After delegation returned, 1st officer announced immediate departure.

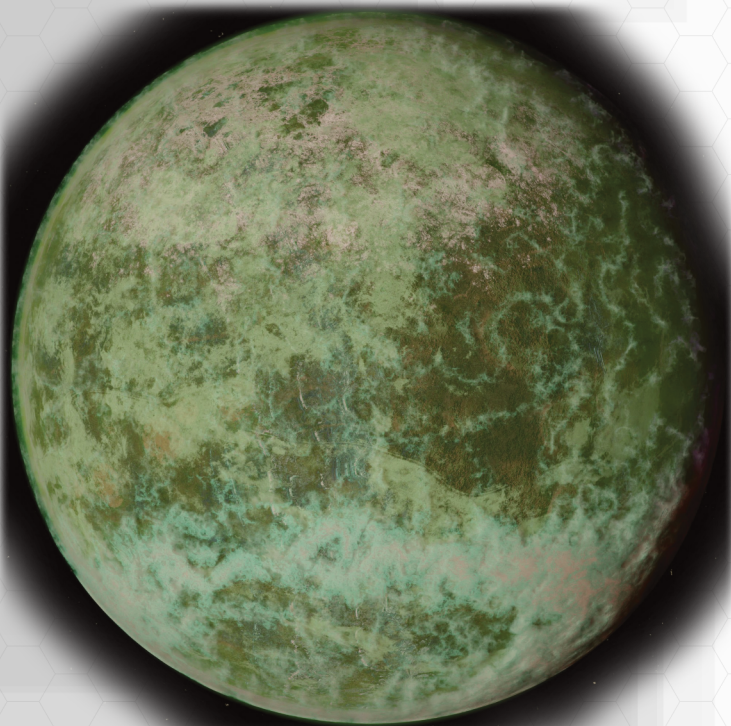
System SO/21299/126/ILU 7
Planet ILU 7-II
Orbit 1.46 AU
Eccentricity 0.034

Environment Corosive | Wet | Stormy
Owner Imperium Of Man
De Estana Incorporated
Population 274 000 as M41.998
Development Mining

Production Rare Minerals
Trace Minerals

Patrol 87 Days

Importance **[MEDIocre]**



— Arrival Day [107] — Pursuit day [93_] — Day of reign [61_] —

It took 7 standard days to return to palace. We were greeted by our staff and officers. I noticed many new faces around. Both employees and soldiers. Maroo managed to get in contact with recruiting corps to send him brightest they had in order to fill in gaps in leadership. Command Center grew in staff. Frederick wasn't thrilled to see newcomers. They were fresh out of recruitment and needed a lot of work in discipline for his tastes. It was also first time rookies ever saw real commissar, shocking their naive beliefs. And their pants as well.

It was just 23 days since we departed, but I felt like coming in for first time.

It all grew . . . distant. Governor's room became empty and barren. I felt like nothing remained of me there. No amount of gold vases could make up hollowness inside.

In the evening, de Estana called to ask how was situation with his mines. I told him main city in complex no.2 was up and running. Workers put to mining as per deal. In burst of overjoy, he opened champagne, pouring himself a glass right on the vid, inviting me to toast for “splendid mutual cooperation”. Promised again he would continue to support my government. He already prepared new officer cadre to open rest of sites in system. How pleased he was to hear navy is finally “covering OUR business”.

On that note, I asked how many freighters he can supply to this end. And apparently he had 8 new haulers in production at Lokinyth, Mara and Stella Attica. It made me very curious to hear how he managed to procure resources. And most of all, how did he manage to get in between scheduled orders. Marcus just smiled, saying he had good supply lines. I kept on insisting, warning him not to play games with me. He disclosed to me that new fabricator saw more reason than other archmagos' before him. It sounded like his supported candidate won, making him burst in laughter, almost loosing this white wig. He sat in chair looking at glass, stroking mustache and said “connections are everything in this world”.

Being good in this game, his shrewd manipulation shifted discussion towards new development in corporation wars. Refurbished food factories could finally begin to supply surrounding worlds but there was issue with pirates pillaging transports. Almost half of freighters in last three weeks lost contained rations for forgeworld. There was capacity of supply but he needed protection from raids. I told him simple resolution would be forming convoys, promising 3 frigates with a light cruiser for 4 convoys. We agreed. Told him to call admiral Kwintet next day to confirm and coordinate.

After we hung up, I called High Command to inform Kwintet of new orders. It was tough decision for him as right now our forces scattered in search of Blacklight's hideout, but acknowledged orders were orders. And most of all it was food transports after all. Then, I could ask about those stash of supplies BL was constantly smuggling out. That pursuit became stagnated. No search party reported any findings. Two destroyers never came back. Ship dispatched to look for vessels never found them. Reassessing situation came with better opportunity.

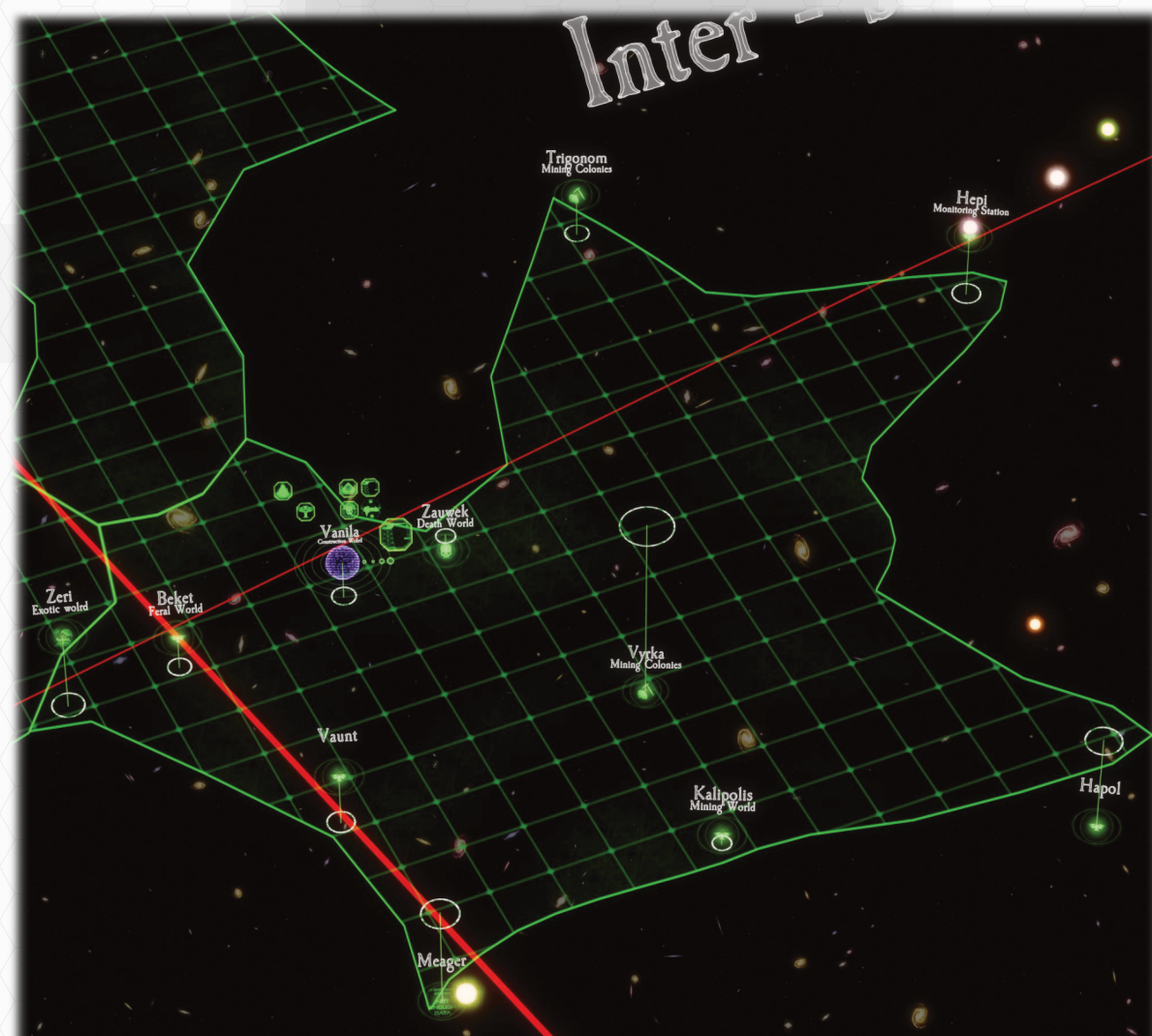
On the other hand, Ork situation was getting out of hand. Their fleets splintered and now headed for neighboring subsectors. Trimina and Demin Glavis



scrambled all forces they could to intercept them. Though it wasn't enough to stop Waagh, they could delay enough to allow us ramp up production. Capital, getting restless, put all available resources to build planetary defenses on their hive worlds, but according to Kwintet and Huges they just panicked and didn't have good personnel to coordinate against splinter Ork group. Or any military threat whatsoever. Our own military no had to secure Riktus Secundus, living hub for mining operations. That was the real problem. It seemed like Morgabius del Porru really didn't know how to handle his armies.

I told him that we would meet next day at palace with Huges, Olsmo and Maroo to discuss sending some help and we disconnected.

I went to Marro to command center and talked with him about possible resolutions. It was about 25 hour local when I returned to bedroom.



— Arrival Day [108] — Pursuit day [94_] — Day of reign [62_] —

In the morning, before meeting, Mastaf came to pass report slate about current state of military forces. I had two hours to briefly read it through.

We started briefing at 10 with a friendly meet and greet before coming down to business. It looked like our team was getting along, but only Frederick remained unofficial towards me. No one wanted to be as daring as Commissar to speak so casually to me.

All the data indicated increasing alien threat but decreased domestic troubles. Advancement of Karnak proceeded smoothly. Last batch of conscripts was sent to front for training. Right now 3rd regiment numbered 1 400 000 men. The only real problem was still equipment.

Maroo brought us closer view of our fighting force. From 10 000 000 new recruits, 6/10 had to be reserved for ship crews due to replacements needed after recent fights. I asked why other star systems couldn't cover difference. It was due to established treaties with Lokinyth forgeworld. Especially when famine shrunk their workforce. Because of food shortages, almost 70 000 000 workers died of starvation just in recent weeks. Governor of Rotuna system, Agatha Madison, was loosing freighter fleet left and right, making deliveries almost impossible. They already had to conscript populace to man new ships. Just like us, they had troubles supplying other worlds. Kwintet already spoke to her and we arranged convoy transportation with de Estana to Hephastus. Lokinyth was just a stop on the way.

And here we finally budged matter of Blacklight's fortress in Reina district. Despite our swift advancement in north, southern states remained steadfast and mounted counter offensive over Jacobi Farmlands in middle of continent. Those were our locally grown meat pastures. One of few lands that were still used like organic farms, a very high quality produce for nobility. Maroo sent 5th regiment of 1 000 000 of soldiers to build defense fortifications and prepare forward base of operations.

Separatists already declared secession from our “corrupted” government. Most of the food industry allied with von Rosette, who held public speech four days ago in his crown city. I already shared knowledge about what kind of help he was getting from Drukhari so we had to get rid of him once and for all before his business partners found upper hand. As you imagine, my estimates weren't enough to declare him a heretic to ecclesiarchy. Cardinal had to have a concrete evidence. Most of all, he and his priest weren't interested in archived logs, rejecting them as “possibly forged in first place”. Until we didn't have it in black and white, Krietlig put this case in abeyance.

On the other hand, at least our war machine worked properly. Huges proposed that we finally use our void superiority, even if that meant destroying farming lands. Kwintet declared that if I could hold back food transports for few days, we could concentrate fleet in system and crush Blacklight's star fortress with overwhelming force. Right now their fleet was scattered in void, performing cowardly hit and run on supply raids.

Best way to deal with separatists was to blockade whole system for BL's transports, confiscating whole fleet. And as for star fortress guarding planetside port . . . I would take it myself. With few heavy words, Frederick finally accepted



my reckless use of force before planing, admitting such action was likely to succeed with proper backup.

Once SoS's void security was compromised, they would go all out, in stupid, rabid attack to take it back, or loose any chance of winning whatsoever.

From what Maroo put in front of us, training of new recruits would take one more month, so we had 7 000 000 totally green soldiers awaiting assignment. With new resources from de Estana we would build weapon factory suited for equipping imperial guard regiment. We could build four whole regiments out of what we already had, and that . . . would be very useful as tithe. Or against Orks. Either way, Mara would become actual capital of sector in wealth, power and military and with our leverage, eventually administration as well.

When matter of new recruits was settled, we called Abrax on open channel to hear about discoveries in old tunnels. As it turned out, system still functioned in half capacity. He managed to map most of all structures, but our enemies had it secured in Reina district. Survey also found very old train deposits and underground factories of operational equipment. His cohort managed to start machinery. Apparently it was capable of building huge trains of all kinds, not only maglev type, but nothing capable of aiding war effort. What did was collection of master crafted weapon reliquary adorned with inquisitorial rosette. In presence of Canoness Magdalene they were currently relocated to St Dominica's Monastery.

Even though it was intriguing to listen to such little secrets, we wanted to know about possible factory mechanicus could build with acquired resources. He gladly accepted the challenge when I informed him we secured shipment from ILU-7. He would contact convent mechanicus at Wezun to begin preparations. We sure couldn't compete with forgeworld, but it started to look like proper manufactorum. At least we could equip our own troops, making sure food supply would return to sector, because until now they vanished somewhere into the void.

This was the greatest mystery. Mara did not suffer catastrophic breakdown of production all of a sudden, but cut distribution. Right now we still operated at 20% of usual supply. Somehow, somewhere, von Rosette redirected a yearly supply of food for 550 billion people. What would he need such huge amount for? Dunno, but we inferred he just wanted to weaken sector, waiting for our mistakes. Maybe because of ego. Or maybe because . . . someone told him so. And most of all, alllllllllllllllllll that food had to be stashed somewhere, but space is too big to just send few ships somewhere expecting results.

We had high hopes though. If we could pull off creating our own troops, Mara would really become independent and powerful world. Not just Agri world. Most of all, stable world with sizable battlefleet at our disposal.

After we said goodbye to Artisan, there was time to finish preparations for our orbital push. I also asked Maroo if we had any spies inside. Well . . . it seemed our military never had intelligence agencies and everything was delegated to recon squads. Just brilliant.

Frederick was all about attacking them head on without worry of retaliation. Huges agreed. Admiral did not. Our only ship capable of withstanding fire of starfortress was currently patrolling Riktus system. It would take it a month to come back.

What would we do in the meantime? I decided to help Karnak in his offensive. It was time to play Sororitas card. They had Warhound titan available



for battle. Mastaf sure wanted to see such beast in action.

So I called monastery. Unfortunately the only available commanding officer was Leonida . . . well . . . I had worse engagements. We didn't want to make a . . . regretful rude demand, forcing them to give up machine. Instead, I used my brain to convince Leo to join our fight against heretics. To help her decide, I threw a little remark about Drukhari supporting Blacklight's effort in space and few remarks about heretical cult of Slaanesh, you know . . . She instantly wanted to know all about xenos. We made a gentleman's agreement that I would forward her report of what happened at ILU-7, taking into account arrangement with Ecclesiarchy and cardinal Krietlig.

A bit cheesy move she couldn't refuse. Admiral offered to pick up titan and transport it to battlefield, however sisters had their own transporter. Besides, she intended to send three 120 sisters as its escort. We ironed out our arrangement around 18 hours and had a little celebration with boys. In meantime, Maroo called someone in central command and laid procedure of data forwarding to monastery.

Frederick called maids to bring in some champagne and dinner. Since there was no more pressing matters that evening, we could just relax for one night, playing some regicide for a change instead of throwing bombs out of a sky, and talking things over with a bit less stiff atmosphere.





— Arrival Day [109] — Pursuit day [95_] — Day of reign [63_] —

I spent next day in office, looking at situation in various systems. Every place in subsector suffered civilian casualties. Mostly freighter crews. We lost little above 60% of all shipments due to raids. Resource transports waited for bigger groups to create convoys, delaying shipments by few days. Even lokinyth couldn't remedy this by sending out all their fleet to support merchant lines. Less food production in Mara meant massive starvation casualties. Rotuna II wasn't able to defend from pirates 50% of time, further increasing food shortages. Beside 16 000 000 crew casualties, hunger took 44 000 000 lives in just Mara subsector in mere 7 weeks. Overall statistics reached as high as 263 000 000 starvation cases in whole sector. How reliable were reports? Probably severely under counted.

It was obvious even to Capital World that they had to send reinforcement to defend our supply lines unless they intended to starve to death. Of course, they only sent frigates to guard lines incoming directly to capital world. Damned be every other system.

Morgabius del Porru kept on sending requests for reinforcements against Orks. I cringed at thought how this idiot wasted millions of lives already sent to him.

Sisters from dialogus covenant came at noon to present me a hefty report about pursuit of chaos cults. It seemed like cockroaches spread not only on our planet. Other branches in surrounding systems reported their gruesome discoveries. All sisters were in full prosecution mode. I was also notified that Canoness Preceptor Lydia was coming back to Mara to oversee command. Janna had her hands full with Ork invasion, concentrating most of her forces in there, leaving only small percentage of sisters to aid in hunting chaos cult across sector.

The good news was returning of normal, everyday life in our controlled cities, despite 8% population loss, which left gaping holes in industry output. Now, when food started to be available, people were willing to work. We also gained upper hand with control of media. Steadily, hacker transmissions were located and eliminated. Huges finally found traitors responsible for bombardment on broadcasting center as well as air raid on low city districts. It was indeed Blacklight's operatives using official uniforms and signatures. As we were cleaning out complex II, Huges cleared out commands out of spies in the most vivid and obnoxious way possible, in public executions. For time being, preparations for our great counterattack were laid. Calculations about our army readiness were far away. Almost six standard months before regiment of 2 000 000 could be fully equipped, but production of low grade slug weaponry could begin even before completion of complex. Mechanicus estimated they would have produced 87 000 las rifles in a month with new assembly line. This would quadruple output of our planetary factories. Wezun would for a time being shift part of production to supply basic soldier equipment, outputing around 200 000 basic soldier necessities a month. Heavy weaponry and armor still had to be imported from Lokinyth.



— Arrival Day [117] — Pursuit day [103] — Day of reign [71_] —

Nothing happened next day. And next day. Actually for next week, all I could do was to sit in office and help Hashir in coordinating our attacks on ground.

There were occasional requests for local intervention in Elkor. I was finally able to help Maroo with all official part of governorship. Eccelsiarchy prepared a banquet, I mean prayer night, inviting most powerful noble houses and him as honorary guest. Boys convinced, or rather made me, attend with them. Most of all Krietlig, to whom I promised to be a bodyguard in public events. This occasion was very special. Holy anniversary of St Mara's triumph over wickedness of xenos, celebrated every 10 solar years.

Neither of us wanted to go actually, but Frederick nagged me to do this governor thing from time to time and show appropriate involvement in . . . power structure. Maroo, as known as he was, did not have renown like mine. Nobility needed to see their overlord to remind them their place, least they start developing unhealthy attitudes.

Nathaniel prepared me special clothes for this occasion. It was a thousand years since I wore such sophisticated garments. Long, blue, shiny coat with high collar, embroidered with gold flowers, forged in pure gold and adamantium. Heavy boots plated with pure gold and hexametric crystals. As it was not enough, cape of fur from planet Yugoov's wasteland Werebear. Very warm and plushy. He even brought a hairdresser with whole damn entourage to make sure I was going to look shiny and immaculate. And since I preferred armor, Frederick arranged for a golden breastplate and gauntlets. At one side, it was impressive, on the other I felt like pet on display. Those things are definitely not my cup of tea, BUT . . . it felt kinda nice to experience it from time to time.

Maroo said it was a good practice to drag muscle around, so I asked who wanted to go. Of course, all of them did. Since albatross only had 6 seats I had to make choices. James had his bodyguard Darius, so I only could take Frederick since Krietlig still didn't move his ass back to his residency, hoping for my protection at all times. At least his guardian Somar was a lively guy.

I don't know what happened or maybe my senses gone hectic but cardinal's soul stunk with rotten fish. I gazed at him from time to time, searching for possible ruptures in his auric field, but he always caught me and tried to joke around about my awkwardness towards him, assuming I was too set back to directly speak to him or ask for advice. It felt very awkward to listen to this . . . religious bullshit he spat on all of us. Worst of all, despite clear indication something with him wasn't right, his aura remained clean.

Yeah . . . his consciousness was pristine clean . . . unused.

A: Oh sure, come on and preach me about my own dad you never even fucking seen with your eyes. Much less know a thing about him.

A: Do I like like zelot type to you? Fall to my knees to pray in a fucking chapel? To my own father?



A: You DO realize it was no one else than LORGAR who wrote this "Holy Book of Emperor's Divinity" nonsense?

A: Heretic or not, it was HIM who wrote this Lectitio Divinatus bullshit.

A: OHHHHHHHHHH SUUURE! You never even checked it in the first place! Never cared at all to understand any of this bullshit.

A: Cry me a river.

A: Ye, I see how much . . .

A: You see how little attention do I pay to this religion nonsense, but for sake of appearances I had to entertain cardinal if I wanted to keep him on my side. I still didn't know his true nature at that time . . .

Anyway, we finally arrived at ecclesiarchy tower. St Basil Cathedral was but a 5 minutes walk away. And then I just had to survive this whole party without cringing myself to death.

Landing was smooth. Staff was overly polite and there was no sign of servitors around. Only well dressed serfs. Walking through obnoxiously rich passages of Ministorum's palace reminded me that even governor is not the most wealthy person in the world. I guess nimiety does not exist for those parasites. There were only two times I ever visited Ministorum. First and last. Before we even got to the building, swarm of reporters and casters surrounded us like flies around rotten meat. Commissar had to use his presence to make passage for us. Once we entered premises of . . . palace, cherubic gates closed down, cutting us off from real world.

All of this place screamed excess. Of gold. Of . . . adornments. Of size. Of . . . I don't know . . . greed. There is no other way I could express what clergy is. It always desires more. It always demands more. It's hunger and lust for power rivaled only by Tyranid hunger. Cloying doesn't even express it. Passages weren't anymore corridors to walk inside but a showcase of art pieces, altars of hypocrisy and power in shape of passage. Seats weren't seats but décor in form of seat. All windows not windows anymore but transparent painting in a glass, inside gold portals. Chandeliers not chandeliers but loosely hanging clouds of golden glitter rays, mounting a light fixture at the end. Even floor itself wasn't just a walking surface but crystalline gold mosaic beneath layer of glowing glass. Figures and statues dressed with real gold jewelry, clothed in most fabulous fabric pieces rivaling my own. Something as simple as ceiling vault decorated with thousands of real crowns built atop thousands of flying sculptures. Gold stucco on the walls mostly covered with hive of candles and purity seals. Anything and everything sculpted in silver, gold or giant gems. Simple servo skulls meshed silver with gold, mounting purple torch atop of it. Their visages masked with adamantium faceplates to present handsome faces of young adepts. Guarding servitors did not look like servitors, but plated from feet to toe in showcase armor pieces.

But, the most curious was lack of Sisters of Battle anywhere near.

The closer we walked to grand chapel, the more unease I felt. It was faint smell of sweet, rotten perfume spreading inside immaterium, with no apparent immediate source. On the other hand, Constantine basked in attention of people



around us. Priests, guests, serfs, cherubs, even machines. As long as everything gained his attention he was smiling and laughing with everyone. I shared my feeling with Frederick by whispering. Once I told him this place was damaging to my aura, feeling hundreds of astral parasites floating in the warp, he asked me to just bear with ceremony. We had to walk about 10 minutes to through those corridors, listening to shit chatter of our mighty nobles. This claustrophobic feeling of spiritual suffocation only deepened when we reached main hall.

Once we entered, most of heads turned towards us. Among golden arches and stained glass of tall windows, cherubs flew around in company of other playthings. Attention of announcer focused on us. And it felt like thousand daggers split my existence in hatred.

But then I took a look around. Preaching of being holy and virtuous, hundreds of priest and their guests engaged in debauchery equal to Slaanesh cultists. I understood that people desire wine and food, but what does of rings of slaves who killed each other for the crowd serve. There was more . . .

Can't say unbelievable, as I saw worse things in chaos slave pits, but . . . not between clergy. On clerestory . . . guests gathered around to feast half in nude, using prostitutes and serfs as their playthings in front of everyone . . . "servicing" them out in the open. And even that wasn't as sick as nailing heretics to a cross in middle of your fucking banquet. All in tune of orchestral music bleeding your ears out in high pitch screech.

I almost broke down, freezing for moment . . . Frederick knew. He fucking knew. And . . . he made me come to see this . . . I saw his face and felt his pain as well. Except for my own disbelief, I couldn't focus on anything.

I wasn't just disappointing. I wasn't just angry. I was . . . shell shocked. All those cultists hiding behind holy preachers of Emperor's virtue . . .

Everyone saw how I reacted. How I took in this sight . . . as their grand ceremony went on.

Before I could blow up, Frederick grabbed me by arm and dragged out of the room. My boys followed. I don't even know if I was devastated by what I saw, but the rage . . . just turned my mind off. I didn't hear or see anything. I barely remember how our transport arrived. I felt like . . . I lost. Critically lost. A resounding defeat. A cognitive dissonance. And boiling blood.

I regained control over myself when we were half way back. Frederick tried to talk to me but little did get through. My thoughts fixated on what the fuck did I just see, being almost happy to know inquisition was on its way.

We spent our way back in silence. Nobody even exchanged gazes. When we landed, I just went to my room, not paying attention to anything around. My mind chew through thoughts, devising worst punishment imaginable to humankind. I was honestly astonished why it didn't end in mass murder or what muffled me at that time. Certainly . . . the thing in the back of my head was responsible.

Hour later someone knocked to door. Frederick came to see me, trying to be considerable, but I felt his true intentions. My predatory senses were at their height. My hands were shaking with anger. Frederick was very tactful in his speech, talking in roundabout way, but it was painfully obvious why. I asked about James, and apparently he wasn't in such distress since . . . he was working around Amschel for years, knowing they had their . . . excess parties. Commissar regretted not telling me how bad was situation but never found appropriate words



or moment to do so. Not to mention explanation of how he came to know it. This . . . banquet . . . was the perfect opportunity to open my eyes for extension of this sickness.

Beleive me, I was angry. But I wasn't angry at cultists. I've seen enough of this shit to point of indifference. Not even at Frederick for hiding truth. My anger was directed to my own self for not noticing such basic and open signs, letting it continue right under my own damn nose. Allowing myself to be so naive and deceived.

After moment of walking back and forth I picked up my PDA and called Monastery. Officer Leonida answered. For few seconds no word came out, but she heard me breathing. Prank calls didn't sit right with her. I finally gathered myself enough and said that . . . I know where she can find head of her chaos cult. She didn't appreciate calling it "her's", but eventually calmed down and asked my what game we were playing. I told her that she can find it at Ministorum, and to save her sisters from total heresy, she should make haste.

I sat on my chair for moment until Fred asked if he could be of any assistance, but there was nothing he could do. He left bowing down.

Not being able to sleep that night, I sat of sofa in front of window and looked at hive city, watching for any signs. I don't know the time, but I waited for few hours until some transports left Ministorum. And then . . . nothing. Laying in anticipation on sofa under window, watching Elkor skies made me to fall asleep.



— Arrival Day [118] — Pursuit day [104] — Day of reign [72_] —

I woke up hour to noon, still tired and went straight to office to have my breakfast there. As soon as I walked out of bedroom, Ojik had to present me with urgent report about what happened last night at Ministorum. Maroo kept it classified, so we moved to office.

Apparently Maroo told every officer stationed in palace last night what kind of part they were invited to. Even if he ordered it to be secret . . . well . . . rumors spread.

And my call to monastery seemed like a success. Around 4 AM Sororitas en mass rushed out of St Basil, local covenants and marched to cardinal's palace, coordinating arrival of monastery forces. At first, they were denied entry, but palatine Leonida broke through gates into main hall by force. On site commander, Canoness Martha, couldn't stand what priests were up to and . . . decided to purge everyone. Quite literary, everyone present. It was almost 2 400 people at the grand banquet and 4 000 workers at Ministorum. Tally still rising as Sororitas pursued everyone who escaped their judgment.

All info channels had footage of bloodbath which happened outside, as no one was permitted to enter inside. Few drones managed to capture aerial video from above walls. There was even footage as sisters trampled civilians in pursuit of escaping . . . I don't know if you can call them priests anymore. Nobody knows how many innocent lives were lost, but for first time I didn't care. I was relieved sisters followed through with their convictions.

Due to my peculiar relationship with monastery . . . they send to central command report of . . . their persecution. One of sister interrogator followed and documented deeds of Commandery. Unfortunately, they found multiple sisters turned into . . . toys for guests. Almost three hours long recording of how Martha, acting under oath to the Emperor in substitution of Janna, burned down whoever could be burnt down. Including priests. It even showed how she decapitated Krietlig, dragging his almost nude, slimy ass under altar of the Emperor to cut off his head with a chainsword. She was not having their excess. Unfortunately, she killed everyone without asking questions. So did every sister. Even Interrogators were told to just purge heretical menace without interrogation.

From what was known, almost all big names of Mara and few surrounding star systems amassed in this . . . ritual. First and foremost, Cardinal Krietlig was dead. Names included vice governor of Rotuna II, Francheska something I don't really remember, Bernardo de Estana – son of Marcus. Gilbert something, head of mining guild. Some other prominent merchants. Commodores and admirals from sector, dozens of captains, few colonels and a bunch of priests. Total number went as high as 3800 guests and around 1800 priests. There were some less important personnel like head of local Adeptus Administratum, grand scribe I can't remember name of. Some of the names were alleged separatist supporters. Multiple giant corporation lost their entire executive structure overnight.

As I listened to report, riots within Elkor erupted all around. Mob was very infuriated with nobility. . . how they lived in vast luxuries and wasted all of it for their . . . parties while poor proletariat was starving.

Command had to intervene and send military to the streets to calm down



citizens. Even this did not stop riots. Many production facilities ended up destroyed. Persecution of wealthy reached its zenith. Even cities like Regna experienced turmoil. And another body count.

According to on site information, we already had 3 000 dead rioters along 400 noble houses raided and 200 dead soldiers already. Palace sent out its forces to protect most important parts of our town. People were angry. First numbers estimated maybe little over 100 000 participants planet wide. Worst of all, general Karnak already reported loss of morale and didn't know if desertion would take place despite two commissars aiding his regiment. And that was just the beginning.

Even before she managed to come back, Lydia commanded to use all available sisters for continued hunting of heretics. All convents on planet were already preparing to march into all palaces and mansions and search for signs of cult. The witch hunt has begun and inquisitor has not yet even arrived. That would be in another four weeks. He stopped by Hephaestus first.

And you know what . . . populous liked it. From all initial reactions, whole planet had enough of exploitation. They wanted someone to put an end to this. Nobody cared how steep will be the price to pay . . . of fucking course. Threat people like cattle and they will start to behave like it.

Anyway. I spent that day with Frederick and Maroo in Command Center, discussing our options. There was no legal obligation from us to help them but . . . it would be most propitious for both of parties to cooperate.

In the evening I called monastery. And . . . pfffffffffffffffffffffffffff . . . it was hard to convince Leonida I wasn't a heretic. For some time, they tolerated my presence, but my very "*timely*" arrival and presence was something she could not ignore. From outsider's point of view, it was very good estimation.

In light of recent discoveries she needed to make sure we weren't tainted and demanded I be brought in for interrogation. I flat out threw in her face my thoughts about their kind of interrogations, always ending in a forced confession. Leo was a doll but had attitude problem and totally didn't like any resistance. Fortunately, before she started to shoot me from eight thousand kilometers away, we had interruption to our communication from Blue Rosary, sisterhood owned Endeavor light cruiser. Yeah, sisterhood had that much power. Both on ground, in space as in politics AND within population. Mara herself was revered as saint.

Lydia cut in. She was very tactful and calm in contrast to Leo. It was to her liking that I displayed far reaching cooperation but it had to be of utmost importance to know that governor is clean. She proposed to meet and discuss. Since there was no better alternative for us at the moment, Frederick accepted their offer. They were few hours of travel away from system and urged we wouldn't leave palace until then, being polite about it, although tonne of her voice helped a lot. It was very vibrant and clear, distinguished, elaborate and articulate, very . . . charming . . . elegant. I don't know if one can describe voice as sweet. It not everyday you say you like sound of someone's voice this much.

Either way, it was announced that Sororitas would come to palace in next days to . . . screen it for any disturbances. I only hoped they wouldn't make shit up, like women usually do.

When order was written and signed, new opportunity appeared in my head. I asked my advisors not to leave and started to prod about who had access to



names of the party goes. Only five in palace and three in high command, except for Sororitas of course. I immediately called de Estana to leverage this information.

He was very aware what happened at Ministorum. And very scared. Tulio had to be sent away to avoid any concerns about his safety, while some of his cousins were caught in crossfire. I shared with him little detail about his son.

First there is denial. Second is trauma. Third is total erasure. He almost lost his mind and broke down upon hearing about it, really afraid of what will become of family, but still had enough clarity to know that I must have had a proposition for him to call in first place.

I tried to be careful about it. We both knew that if I didn't help him, sisterhood would have his balls, guild and head. In that order. Soooooo aaaaaa, we settled for a few favors. Since he mentioned he had access to shipyards outside queue time, I asked what would it take to build myself a ship, joking around about Oberon battleship and instead of shouting "that's ridiculous" he fell silent and begun to brainstorm how to access such vast amount of resources. Honestly, we were in shock.

After few minutes of, mainly monologue, he told me if I can promise him immunity from Sororitas witch hunt AND keeping his house name out of anything in the open, even erasing it from manifest, he can bring us such ship in a year.

And we were like "What The Fuck!". Mara could barely classify to requisite a cruiser and he can snap fingers to get damn battleship?! Maroo's jaw dropped. Frederick couldn't believe hearing it. I was flabbergasted as well, not believing my ears. WE couldn't believe just how rich, the richest guys were. Fred nagged me to take the deal, but I had to play for time.

I told Macrus the truth, that there is no guarantee but there was opportunity to do so, still keeping my political card close. Only my closest associates knew we had something like a mutual relationship with sisterhood. I proposed we would setup a meeting where he could explain himself and with a dose of my presence, be left off the hook. Oh, was he overjoyed and hyped. Jumped on the idea instantly. He vowed that he will foot the bill if this got done. I said the cliché "I'll see what I can do" and hung up. Once finished, both of them jumped and shouted like little girls. I had to remind them that this wasn't over yet and keep their mouths shut. Even before it got dark, they already delinted a plan how to upkeep such behemoth over their skies. It was disheartening to tell them there would be no battleship. Imagine the disappointment.

We had war on our hands and needed quick solutions to pulverize von Rosette, chaos cult and Orks. Not to mention Drukhari raids. I wasn't thinking about building new ship but prospect of cutting into the line at forgeworld. Inquisition was coming. Black ships were coming. It wasn't anymore a matter of tithe, but survival of our worlds. Mara already had problems feeding itself. If we didn't at least managed to reconquer the planet in next few weeks, whoever was to arrive, would do it in very peculiar intention, and not in a good way. Not to mention we could finally start building up better equipment. We needed a fleet, sure. A damn frigate can be built in a month en masse, but we needed to rearm men and make up for tithe. If inquisitor started investigation, then it would be obvious that Mara was at fault. And Maroo, and Olsmo, and Huges, and Lydia and Janna and Katie the cook and Emmy the maid. And he would not hesitate to redo



everything. Planet itself is too valuable, but people on it? Considering possible spread of chaos on planet, not even agri world could be safe from Viral Bombs.

To make sure supply equaled demand, he would just purge half of world's population. And then he would go to other planets and do the same. Just to make sure Lokinyth had production resources to speed up roduction. It's not just a coincidence that inquisitor was coming to collect it.

Ehhhhhhhhhhhhh . . . and they knew I meant it. They could see frustration painted all over my face.

A: Well . . . unfortunately we didn't know anything about you.

A: He haven't even sent a message to official inform anyone about his arrival.

A: Well, 'm so sorry to estimate inquisition based on lack of information, you didn't provide.

A: Yeah, sure, she might have been your undercover agent, but we didn't know she was.

I excused myself for now and returned to room. Called Marcus before going to bed to inform him there will be meeting with Sororitas day after tomorrow at palace, but he had to prepare his most pious behavior.

Still, there was no sleep for me. Watching stars couldn't dispel all my worries building from all sides with greater and greater pressure. It made wonder what would be happening if little me never came there. Could it be worse, could it be better. How would world react to new puppet. What would become of them had inquisition arrived. And on, and on, and on, and on . . .

Looking at emptied out dressing wardrobes reminded me of Ada. Of what I saw on raider barge. Of all the girls that were used . . . and the dreadful certainty that there is a Haemonculus in the shadow, doing its wicked experiments on slaves they captured. And no one is the wiser.

I never shared that part, knowing I just have abandoned hundreds if not millions of people to fate worse than death. Most of all, probably no one in there ever even heard that word, not even Sororitas and . . . it was up to me to set it right. I don't know if what I felt then was dread, anxiety, stress or . . . uncertainty, but I felt time to use my full power was coming.

And it . . . he felt it too.

Was this despair? I cannot tel, but . . . I felt his craving. It knows. It always knows and lets me know that it knows. Because whenever there was a calamity . . . he would harvest. He was patient. He always waited for right time. And . . . I just knew it was inevitable, but still . . . tried to do all in my power to make sure not to feed him. In times like this people tend to . . . turn to desperate means. And I guess so did I. There was only one person in my mind who could help with this.

I called to forward command center of general Karnak. He was surprised to hear me out of all people. We talked a bit about situation of Olman City and how was food production going. You know, things to just . . . begin the conversation. I directed my question on how mayor and his administration was complaint with overtaking, and when time was right I asked for a way to directly talk to him.



When finished, I gathered my thoughts for minute and used PDA to direct my communication line under specified unit. For few moments, nothing. I thought that it just had to be choice of fate. But . . . even after I laid in bed I couldn't think of anything. Nagging feeling told me I had to call once more. I just had to. Otherwise it would not pass.

This time someone did pick up. Before any words were spoken, a period of few seconds passed. He then asked what was this all about in very arrogant manner. He didn't know who was calling, he just heard my breath. Before he hung up I spouted, that I need to contact Edmund.

Myon fell silent for a moment, letting out little, shy laugh, being very surprised I did call after all. In his extravagant, imaginative victory, tried to savor moment of preponderance over my "need" to contact Reitziger. I saw counter on my call. He went over his great venerable ego for 2 whole minutes straight, but assured me it could be done. There were possibilities to contact him right there and then so I urged him not to elongate, as his master already expected me. Big shouts of denial flooded my vox so much it decreased volume level. Boy totally didn't like not being put in the same big category as Edmund, much less as servant. But I got what I wanted. He told me to wait and left his communicator opened. I stared on my PDA as onto holly book. Waiting was killing me, but as the same time, wishing he didn't respond at all.

22 minutes later someone cut the line in my vox, connecting different line into same frequency. The same, deep, chalk voice I knew. After a moment of laughter to rub it in my face he just asked as in ecstatic awe, "Wasn't she wonderful".

He knew. For fuck's sake, somehow he knew that I met succubus on this fucking eldar bridge. And he laughed even harder when asked about it.

It drove me fucking nuts . . . holding myself from smashing this device on the ground. I was just wondering how far he knew . . . and after he stopped laughing his lungs out . . . we could exchange few words. Mainly he did. I . . . didn't know what to say, so keeping silence was best option.

Reitziger was in very bright mood. Said that all his creations were pinnacle of wonder. His mouth never stopped to giggle, boasting about his great plan spanning whole galaxy, changing face of the existence forever more, which couldn't be realized without my help. And then I heard her . . . she . . . asked "who are you talking to, doctor" and I froze. Reitziger responded "our new, little acquaintance". Asked her if she wanted to say hi and . . . she did. I heard echo of stilettos in vast room, climbing with thump over stone stairs. He encouraged her to speak into some console. I replied by speaking her name. She was positively surprised to hear me . . .

I had . . . a welter of bad emotions constricting my stomach. I couldn't know if that was . . . the real her or another clone. Or even if that was person on the other side, o-o-o-or just a robot, or a recording device, or a servitor playing her, but . . . it, she spoke just as I remembered her, which made me angry how he tried to emotionally play me once again. I would not fall for it anymore. It was time to let it go and look at reality around me.

Before we could strike a real conversation, he asked her to check upon flowers in bay 3. Cleared his throat and spout innocent "where was I". Fucker started to hum himself melody under nose and talk in meantime about my far



reaching achievements, applauding my skills as governor. Said he was able to foresee how well I did my job. I finally asked if it was good enough to get rid of his friends, but . . . he busted in laugh, loosely stating they were not friends. I wanted to know for how long did he know. Since when did he cooperate with SIN. And what happened to Amschel, What was his ultimate goal, how did he know everything that has happened to me.

It only served bolstering his giggling. Cut my question short with simple "It wouldn't be fun if I did", assuring me there was no needed to worry about previous puppet as his usefulness ended. And as far as his girls were concerned, well . . . they probably reached their lifespan. After he stopped laughing again, asked me how he could be of service to me.

I needed help with tithe, which made him chuckle. Started to talk to me like to a child, enumerating my little mishaps here and there. Wasted opportunities and allegiances. And . . . as he was coming into subject of sector wide problems, begun to talk a bit more explicitly, clearly, more suggestively about what my presence has brought upon whole world of Mara, Laughing again.

It was then, when he asked me if I really knew what I was doing on Mara. As governor, as soldier, as master of power, as gift of the Emperor, as . . . "puppet of fates" he said . . .

Asked me how did it feel to be thrown into position so out of time and place, as unwilling pawn in game I did not understand. As piece on chessboard I could not perceive. And after moment of focus over welding something, he said, he knew how to help me.

Without better option left, I listened to his proposal. He could tell me where did Blacklight had their outposts. Where Drukhari take their hostages. Who was responsible for Ork invasion. Were lied center of the cult. Who killed previous fabricator. Why were preparation for this uprising done months in advance. I could have locations of enemy fleets and even their crew manifests. He would tell me where to strike to take Reina fortress back. How to find von Rosette. He would tell me his location and even give me plans of his bases. He would show me secrets of life. He could help me with sororitas. He would help me with inquisition. He could tell me secrets of inquisitorial vaults that not even Kaifias got glimpse of.

He could bring me Back Betty . . . Said she was was for the taking. Waiting just for me. He knew what what to do to hide from black ships.

And all it took . . . was to give him a vial of my blood . . . he would trade everything I and whole world needed for a fucking vial of my blood. Just like that.

I was in a bind . . . I had to think about my purpose. After all . . . Father brought me to life in order to keep the world safe. I was supposed to erase monstrosities and make room for brighter future of humankind . . . And I believed in this coping mechanism. At that time, it seemed only logical to make most of the bad situation. One vial for fate of whole sector. It doesn't take genius to understand undertone of this transaction.

I didn't think for too long and agreed. But with a promise no one could know, hear or even know about it, which made him laugh, but not in a good way. Not his usual way. It sounded more like whispering echo from a well. Very disturbing, making me search for sudden damage to device. There was a pause. Moment of silence between us. I could hear some sparkling in his vox, like a welder or something. But he was there. I heard this . . . breathing like smokey



wind slowly pushing through a pipe.

He began to talk again, in more precise and concrete manner, just like we would be going over a plan. Spoke about how he would send an agent to collect and exchange our "gifts".

I needed to be sure that nobody would ever know about it and he laughed again, ensuring me that I was very well covered. It didn't incite confidence in me, so he forwarded proposition to open battery capacitor under the thumb on backplate of my PDA. It was only self cocking aluminum clip, so easy to open. And I . . . saw that there was etching in inside part of cover.

Date of our assault on palace. M41.999.07.29. With elegantly machined words "you are safe with me". I let out silent "what the fuck" just to listen to his narcissistic laughter.

I could not comprehend just how or when this could be done. He immediately explained to me how he managed to "enhance" my communicator diagram of my PDA by borrowing it from me as I slept in foreman's room, after our party night, but strongly stated that it was done so that no one could listen or track me. Not von Rosette, not inquisition or even himself, saying it would be too easy if everyone would take advantage of it and that he didn't even need it to read through me.

I demanded to know how he knew everything so far. It only fueled his amusement. I wouldn't get an answer. He just told me that my device was safe enough to even download forbidden data from vaults. He allegedly improved my device with gravitational muon pulse coding technology, allowing me to connect with other comm arrays throughout segmentum without time lag at all.

I had serious doubts, but . . . he made point that broadcasting array was destroyed and I could call every place any time without any problem. Even those still within warp. How come my vox was so good it could call ships in different star systems in inter-dimensional space without astropath's assistance. How come my PDA could display data in holographic manner as good as mechanicus noosphere. How come it never malfunctioned. How come it always had appropriate cypher key for broadcast or security clearance.

Once again, he vaunted about how wonderful things he could craft also in metal, not only in flesh, being very much glad I put it into proper use. How light headed I was in using my own communication device to reach so high value grids without ever before asking permission or securing lanes. How I never used proper channels or wavelengths, never truly understanding frequency patterns of local systems, just pushing a button with appropriate contact data to talk.

But he underlined he trusted in me. In my . . . lack of preparation or knowledge of local scene. In my hasty and ad hoc decision making. In my hotheaded nature. In my impulsiveness. In my predictability . . . And that I rewarded his trust in full.

Apparently, this . . . knowledge he willingly shared, was yet another investment in me and my abilities. I tried to play with him a bit and threatened to kill his sidekick, take the data and give nothing back. In display of amusement, he stated it would not come to such situation, because my worries lied in opposite direction.

Before he would disconnect I . . . told him about audit and de Estana situation. He couldn't believe how naive and straight forward I was to tell him



such things directly. His laughter was greater harassment than any words ever could, but in the end advised me after all. Said that Marcus is over, I should throw him under the threads and focus on young Tulio if I really wanted to use family power for resolution of planetary situation. Even . . . told me what I should say and do to make it look like I tried to help in the process. Few pointers to how Marcus thinks and acts.

It . . . ahhhhhhh . . . It made my heart drip with acid to listen and even consider using it. I felt the schism in my body and mind. My blood turned to ice. My feet gone cold. My hands started to shake as I listened to his detailed description how to setup all meeting. Not because I haven't done it before, but because it all came from his twisted head. It . . . probably was my subconscious reaction trying to reject it.

At the end . . . he doubted I would ever heed his advice. Said It would be resoundingly unwise to take advice from my "adversary", with perfidious tone. Wished me good luck, repeated I had nothing to fear and said goodbye.

I sat on bed with PDA in my hand, feeling disbelief and disappointment in myself to fall so low as to make common cause with such man as Reitziger. Worst of all, trying to make use of his knowledge. I . . . I thi . . . no . . . I almost trusted him. More than Frederick. More than Maroo. Perhaps even more than Sororitas. Eeehhhhhhhhhhhhhh . . . From all things that ever happened . . . I could count on his sincerity, even if we were enemies in the end. It's really hard to explain how it felt . . .

Tried to sleep but my mind was filled with doubts. I was scared my decision would prove to become another mistake costing lives of billions. It felt like resistance is futile.

And . . . out of all times, he then came out of his hidey hole to mock me. Void claws stroked my astral body gently and delicately, yet it was so harrowing. Like predator licking meat of its victim, I knew he was readying for a feast.

It was 5 AM when my mind calmed down enough to sleep.



— Arrival Day [119] — Pursuit day [105] — Day of reign [73_] —

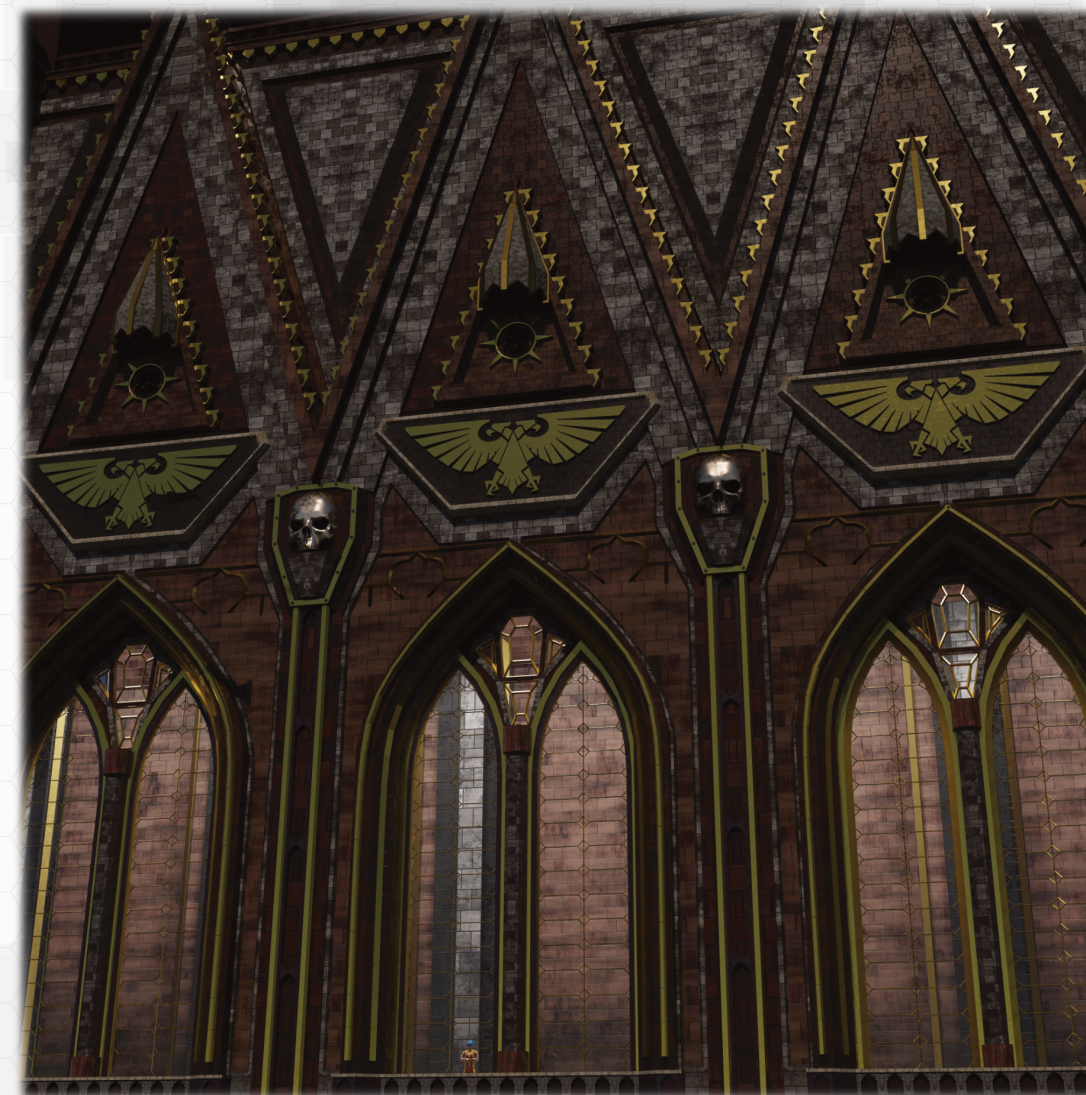
Next was a rainy day. Thunderstorm rolled over Elkror plains. Hurricane brought massive amount of water into fields. Thanks to irrigation nothing flooded, but banks of Rivus almost let water out.

I spent morning in office trying to work but my consciousness nagged me incredibly. It was just enough to allow me sign papers mindlessly without even reading them.

Maroo came to report. He was concerned that I might have gotten wrong impression of him previous day. I calmed him down, telling it was understandable and there was no bad image left in my mind. Just advised him that he shouldn't skin the cat just yet as we didn't know future.

Even food didn't taste as it once did. Tea seemed to be a tree bark brewed lemon piss. I spent whole day fighting my own thoughts.

In the evening central command received official announcement of procedures delegation of sisterhood will perform next day. We just couldn't sit still, knowing what was coming.





— Arrival Day [120] — Pursuit day [106] — Day of reign [74_] —

Sisters were to arrive by noon. Frederick decided to bolster morale before visit and prepared joint breakfast where officer cadre would dine with us at one table. Marcus arrived with small entourage just in time. Council room has been rearranged into long table, stretching from window to the entrance. Over 150 people gathered.

Olsmo, Maroo and de Estana sat beside me at the end. I wasn't talkative type so fortunately they didn't expect me to color their chat. Commissar however . . . didn't fall for it.

I tried to look all natural and behave as normal. It only . . . worsened the case. He eyed me constantly as I lowered my head to look at the plate. I tell you . . . I have done such things thousands of times before, but . . . this time felt really bad.

Generally, everyone was in high spirit. Glasses shone in early morning sunshine. Cool breeze refreshed warm air inside. It was almost . . . pleasant. As much I tried, my face mirrored in gold plate was getting only more somber. When I heard giant clock bell for 11 hours, guts twisted in me, being aware of . . . time of audit.

Once we finished main course, snacks slid onto the table and our men had some wine. Soldiers sat themselves in groups at smaller tables under walls. I didn't even reprimanded if someone tried to smoke cigar. Frederick kept everyone behaving.

We, I . . . sat still at the table, listening to Marcus and James talking about possible methods of "contributions". De Estana was full of seriousness as well as humbleness. Even so, he still drank his wine and stroked his long mustache with goatee beard, wearing his usual golden trench coat. Constantly brushing his curly wig with gold hairbrush. He seemed . . . relieved and happy. Grateful for opportunity we present him.

I couldn't look him in the eye. I didn't want to look him in the eyes. I was so out of myself. Frederick asked me into office and questioned if I really was alright, due to my strange behavior. Said that he smelled something was wrong with me. With my eyes which lost some of its glow.

And . . . I . . . couldn't keep it anymore. I didn't say anything about my call to Reitziger, but I turned a story how someone told me how to deal with Marcus to get most beneficiary outcome for sake of planet. Essentially went through points of my plan and its consequences. Once burden was off my chest, I sat in my chair.

Frederick wasn't phased. Not even blink of an eye. And appreciative of my honesty. Asked me what were my intentions for this meeting. He would not question my methods as long as it brought prosperity to humanity, but I honestly didn't want to cut Marcus off. Not like that. Yet, knowing how deep he sat in business of arming cultists, even if unknowingly, providing them help and most of all, fathering a rallying figure to debauchery of Slaanesh cult, he would be done altogether, while Tulio would be easier to . . . direct.

I kept on thinking over merits, but my heart screamed not to. For a quarter,



he just stood under door not moving a muscle. We kept silent. Only welter of buzz behind wall. Knock on the door cut silence like a knife, inciting a short spike of anxiety.

Maroo checked if everything was alright. Frederick directed him back, confirming all was right, and continued to stand there. Another half an hour passed but I finally made a choice to not to rid of old de Estana just yet.

We returned to dining table and I could finally have something to eat. It was near 12 hours when company disbanded to their posts. When we remained only in company of inner circle, I let Marcus know what was the deal that hunted me all morning.

At first, he was indignant, yet it turned into humility, telling us he felt touched. He understood my position to use other like this. Possibly. After all this roller coaster of emotions he, probably for first time, sincerely thanked someone for such extension of my honesty, as he was no stranger to such politic swivel.

We dropped pretenses and facades. He asked me trustfully if there was indeed any way out of this situation. The only thing I could offer is help, not free out of jail card. It was beyond doubt that his family and their resources were of vital importance to our current effort of revitalization, but the way he made business on side, directly impacting spread of chaos cult is also a grave accusation. I had no idea what would sisters look for or what was their real motive, however he had our support. My support anyway.

To prepare for audit, we went to our rooms. Mainly because I wanted to be alone for while. We had hour and half left till canoness and her commandery visited palace. I spend all of it thinking out strategies based on what Reitziger told me. It also helped to calm me. Clarity of mind returned. A bit of meditation and thought discipline does wonders.

When time was nigh, sentry posts outside city informed us of incoming Valkyrie formation of sisterhood via radio. In addition, covenant of St Basil sent convoy to assist them.

Maroo was still handing out orders when we gathered at landing pad at high palace. Frederick took over conducting of our men. Everyone was waiting. It was maybe five minutes until we saw their machines over eastern fringes of city. Waiting was killing me. I just wanted to get over with it.

Only one craft headed to us while six other landed on ground level. We saw how trucks of the order crossed main road connecting palace with city, but before we could have better view, our guests touched down.

I was in front of welcoming committee. Two rows of soldiers on each side of platform stood ready for salutations. Sisters took their time to open doors. And . . . man . . .

In front of her celestial bodyguards, Lydia was aaaaaaaaaaaaa . . . very contrasting even for Sister of Battle. How to even say it . . . I was . . . my jaw dropped in awe to see a canoness of her beauty.

No, you don't get it . . . Lydia was over 7 feet tall, you see. On top of that she wore this plated stiletto boots and that . . . wow, man. And her boob plate. Damned if you look, pity if you don't . . . I tell you, despite everything Synthia was implicated in, really did pull through with her goal. I wondered if all top officers went through enhancement . . . no wonder if you know why . . . Let's leave it for now, you will understand later.



Clad in full armor adroned in silver roses as much as gold insignia of the order, black oxyd underneath was almost fully covered by flowery arabesques. Her big body, I-I mean glamorous shapes, so tightly underlined with sculpted plating. Red cape strapped to back of her shoulder pads, braided with fleur de lis carmin, glossy weavings. Long, white, curly hair braided into tail at height of shoulders. Her glossy, green eyes underlined with thick smudge. Marvelous, unblemished visage of her rosy skin and red lipstick, sprinkled with perfume . . . It reminded me of Ada. Like her sister.

I was just . . . skeptical of their battle readiness. The only time we saw those sisters in action was their assault on Ministorum, but I hoped they fought as good as they looked.

Despite first impression sinking deep in all gathered, there are things you cannot mask, like your body movement. She was a warrior after all. All her movement was flawless and without unnecessary swings. Fluent and purposeful, like handling a weapon in battle. Her walking itself was enough to signify well trained muscles. Nonetheless, she tried to remain casual towards us.

Her celestians however did not try to appear or appeal, going about their business as professionally as they could. Only sister superior Greta removed her helmet, capturing gaze of my men with her chocolate skin, perhaps even more than at Lydia. In addition, imagifier stepped out of transport bearing Simulacrum Imperialis.

So . . . Lydia greeted us with dose of grace in her arms and voice. It was as comfy as I remembered. Eloquent and flowery language or her oratory skill was almost intimidating. Neither of us was used to such calm and polite and captivating sororitas.

I saw through my mind's eye how golden was her spirit. It was . . . unusual to see spirit who can guard itself from astral leeching in such degree. All around her, even other sisters dimmed out out in comparison.

Before we vacated pad and headed back, she enunciated official disposition of Canoness Superior about audit within whole body of governance. We needed to provide her access to my office and prepare to host incoming sisters. Frederick immediately sent out men to different sections with appropriate orders. We entered palace in silence. I thought I was the one to understand the heat of inquisition, but our people finally started to feel anxiety once they met sororitas up real close. Under normal circumstances nobody would ever be discomforted by their presence. Not that day.

Once in council room, sisters waited until top brass sat in chairs to inform us about performing multitude of conducts to determine our loyalty. Upon end, canoness moved to office, inviting me and advisors inside, but due to recent situation, most of them had to return to posts. In the end, only me, Frederick and de Estana could follow.

While Lydia sat in my chair, entertaining us with small talk about state of our internal affairs, sisters patrolled floor. For some time, all services would cease. I felt I had to be the best host one could. Something outside my normal self. Commissar stood under door as waiting for something. Marcus sat terribly tense, like on a landmine. Maroo already gone to lower levels overseeing accommodation of audit, so it was all on me whether I liked it or not. And . . . partially I guess. . . because I felt charmed.



A: Yeah, I know how ridiculous it is, but you can't blame any man for that.

A: You already have her pictures. You can infer.

A: Yes, but it would be warping timeline. If you really want to know, ask Tigran.

A: You see, at least someone understands.

At first, we talked about sensitive material from Ministorum. Sister wanted to know how many were aware of recording, what happened that night, and what I had to add. It was just easier to tell what occurred there from start to end. She smiled when I "confessed", delighted by my cooperation.

And that was moment when I felt I had an opening to bring issue of people found in manifesto. Suspicion painted in her eyes great displeasure, but she decided to amuse me for moment. For some reason she was very reluctant to bring it up. Reitziger mentioned that sisters had to slay many of their own who . . . were used. Elaborated that if I can play on their guilt, caused by this discovery, there was chance to make her comply. He also told me how Lydia is very straightforward but doesn't like straightforward language so I should speak in vague, eloquent way. She also had reputation for poignant persecutions. Thanks to her manners she could be deceptive, however above all, Lydia hated in perverse prejudice people displaying false piety. And since I was known for taking imperial faith. . . very lightly, I should just behave like I ever do.

I started with small things, like . . . priesthood. Yeah. In return, she wanted to hear my account about interactions with Cardinal Krietlig, as I was very helpful to him in late times. She knew it was only to secure military cooperation between Military and Adepta Sororitas and under watch of Janna, but sill had to ask. I didn't hold back my tongue when describing obnoxious behavior cardinal displayed during his stay at palace.

Alright, perhaps I did. I tried to get on her good side, you know.

And then I mentioned name of Bernardo de Estana. Her frown turned into slight, surreptitious smile. Continued to listen to me without taking her eyes off me. I went through few hoops to present my economic adviser Marcus de Estana, father of deceased. It only made her smile more. And I felt a bit of contempt in her eyes as well. I already used ace up my sleeve to pitch the subject and was running out of ideas how to pierce though her facade. She deflected my attempts at painting him as regretful of such abominable son and . . . she wasn't buying it.

After many tries she finally asked in agitation, why would I cover for de Estana, knowing his corporation was partially responsible for cult erupting among people. I replied that it was behind his back, never truly knowing how his business partners worked. She underlined, that what happened at ministorum has been caused by his actions for long time, enumerated all instances how de Estana family plunged whole sector into misery embrace during their cooperation with Society Of Sovereign. It jolted a shiver through old man's body.

No amount of reasoning found its anchor. Lydia was very well prepared and my every attempt met another counterargument. After it looked like I run out of



ideas she turned to him and joked that everyone pays for their crime, eventually. So, as my last resort, without thinking, I added “just like Synthia”. Her expression did not change, but her fingers clamped into fists. I guess only I saw rests of the armchair, standing in front of office desk, so it must have looked like just a usual remark for Marcus and Frederick as she responded casual “Just like Synthia”.

Seeing how it worked, I decided to renew my attempts. Painted de Estana as source of humble donations, capable of helping our fight at large scale. Marcus finally could speak out on subject he was versed in.

Lydia started to reminiscent of their neighbor city of Mare Flos, praise their tall chapels and wide gardens and etc., wishing their sisters could properly take care of its security. Marcus nodded enthusiastically with every time and promised to lend all help they wished for, agreeing in his hypocritical, slimy manner with all statements. He knew how to bullshit people.

I, on the other hand, was mighty suspicious about her attitude. She looked at me this whole time, smiling. So I finally asked her what is so special about that city that Sororitas couldn't acquire architects and designers of their own. She said that I should visit city and see for myself, offering she and her sisters could provide a free tour. It became apparent she didn't care how casual my remarks become. And I didn't notice when they did.

This time, without much pretense, I asked if she is willing to give him chance to prove his loyalty to the Emperor. She would, but. . . only if I proved mine. AAAAAAANDDDDDDD yes . . . there we go . . . had a haunch it would come to this. I tired to present my achievements as enough, but ... uuuuuuuffffff it wasn't for her. She needed to witness my act of faith.

I asked how would I prove it and she replied that true servant of the Emperor knows how. Normally I could just recite few passages from scriptures, add pompous and ardent avid proclamation of faith, toss in some . . . poetic and high gothic, pious vows, but it wasn't going to work here. I saw already she did not care for de Estana. Most probably never did, always fixating gaze at me.

She wanted to check if my presence was dictated by Emperor's grace or by presence which should not be named. I kept cool, knowing she wouldn't try to pull gun on me, but this wasn't just about my presence as governor. I was psyker. That was her real goal. To check if I was infested.

Once it dawned upon me, I took a step back. She lifted off chair. Her gaze turned from warm and welcoming into asperious. Took out of her hip pocket communicator and called out to sister imagifier, who reported holy banner becoming agitated, crackling with light.

She had doubts whether my presence is spurious or even sanctioned. She was the first one to ask me why my eyes were glowing in the first place, how come I used so much power without ever loosing my mind, have I ever gone through binding ritual and closing distance with every word. I felt . . . excited and worried at the same time.

Because their order has never heard of seen such human like me, it was imperative I was brought to monastery for “medical examination”. Her smile turned wry and I know threat when I hear one.

Before we did something regretful, I asked what did Janna think about it. This made her drop facade. Pretty face turned into visage of contempt. We had a sore standoff for longer moment. I felt anger building up within her aura. I don't



want to be . . . assuming, but if I had to guess, she didn't know how to intimidate me and lost her grip. We experienced something like this with Canoness Superior when we visited her, Yet unlike Janna, Lydia didn't know how to overcome my shell.

A: Under normal circumstances, yes. Probably

A: Canonesses I met till now wouldn't care two bits and just burst in with her sisters to drag my butt out or shoot dead on sight.

A: I have no idea why they didn't. I suppose fact I was governor held them back. Or maybe they felt they did not have way to overpower me.

A: Well . . . there probably was issue of . . . aaaaaaaa . . . conditioning process. You'll know it later.

As our stare contest ended, she marked her words very carefully saying “inquisition is not going to ask” and leaving at quick pace. Frederick opened door for her while I sat back at my chair. Once we were alone, he stood in front of desk to congratulate my stance, joking that she likes me.

It boggled my mind to untangle whether he was sarcastic or not. According to him, normally, she wouldn't hesitate drag me out by hair or spilling guts if necessary, underlining they were sororitas and fully indoctrinated into their ways, just like commissars are. It was first time I saw him smiling to me, applauding my carefree indifference to her threats. The only thing he advised me, was to use more ornate language as governor's office would expect of me.

Our guest . . . was venting his lungs with deep breaths, asking if he was in good or bad position. We didn't have much time to wonder as three sisters walked in, “inviting” everyone, except me, to palace sanctum for further questioning.

For few hours all upper levels became vacated. Even streets of noble residencies quarter. Eerie silence. On bottom of the stairs of governor's chambers, convent setup a checkpoint of battle sisters to make sure no one escapes vetting. It was very explicitly said to me, that I wasn't permitted to leave my section. All lifts remained inoperable, all flights halted, all staircases guarded until process has been completed.

I made myself tea and spent rest of day sitting in office. Having nothing to do, and just read through some reports at the front line.

At 22 hours most essential staff returned. Housecarl explained screening process sisters put them through. Most people were just rough handled and asked questions, put in front big black screen and made stand, while hospitalers used some kind of device to sweep their body. Some returned with bloody nose or bruises. Some had wounds cut on their arms and some kind of probe inserted under their skin. Some were marked with Ministorum purity sigil burned on their arms. In his estimation, concerning how long it took to screen top staff, it would take few days to complete it in whole palace, even with hundreds of sisters.



— Arrival Day [121] — Pursuit day [107] — Day of reign [75_] —

Next day, only most basic staff was permitted to enter high quarters. Soldiers and even council body remained at interrogation.

Since there was no more major reports to go through, I just sat in my room, planning for our next attack. I called admiral Kwintet to ask about our void supremacy and arrival status of our cruiser in light of intended assault on Starport Gamma. We exchanged few sentences but there was nothing more to report than I already knew.

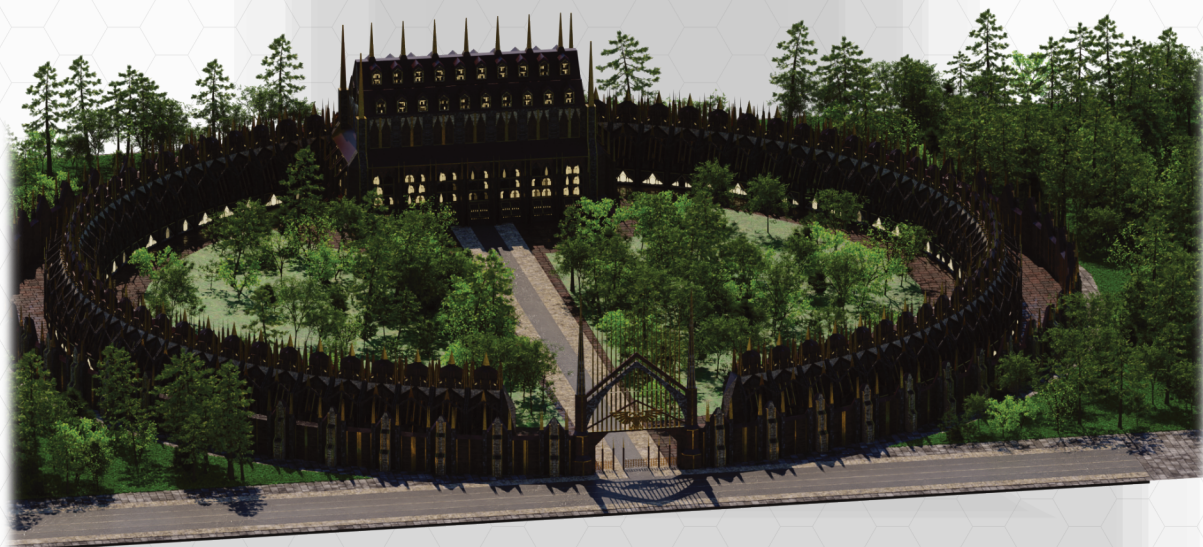
In the evening, top officers came back to their duties. Frederick paid no attention to what was happening, like it wasn't even happening. Yet he did complain how throughout Lydia was in their interrogation, which looked more like intelligence gathering than real search for corruption. She even ignored claims of head priestess in chapel about how blasphemous we behaved towards holy relics of the Emperor. She even made up things to spicy it up further, which was met with great disapproval from Lydia once she learnt about lies.

Just when we were about to leave office, sister famulous came seeking access to archival data repository. First time I heard about it. Frederick, with heavy heart, led her out and drove to Administratum complex at outer wall to secure special access pass.

Lines

21108 - 21126

Lost due to recording data corruption



— Arrival Day [122] — Pursuit day [108] — Day of reign [76_] —

During next day I was finally able to walk past sentries without any problems. From boredom, I took a walk to central command. However, on my way down I have heard dark side of this interrogation - yells of pain coming from side corridors. Sentries cut off passage into wing. Not even I had access to processing chambers.

Sisters would not let anyone in without explicit order. Just when I heard another scream, perhaps more . . . digitized, like through vox caster, someone screamed in another chamber in another corridor. Asking what is going on there, I was told that techpriests were under examination. It made me curious who could have even examine techpriests anyway. And . . . they brought up name of Kitlana, Magos Biologis working with hospitalers. Memory of what Kaifas found out came back to me, especially this name. I asked if Magos would be available for health consultation afterwards. One of sisters frowned her eyebrows sensing something was up, but just declined me entirely, reminding me that I should take such requests to canoness Lydia.

That was exactly what I tried to avoid. I needed to talk with Kitlana about how she actually knew about Synthia. Perhaps she could shed light on how KIT-4E died in the first place. For time being, I returned to my room and called Abrax to ask about new fabricator of Lokinyth and possibly if he knew anything about death of KIT-4E. It put him into high alert. According to him, nobody outside mechanicus conclave shouldn't even know about change in leadership. It was not only very secretive but outright struck out of record, but he shared his knowledge with me in good faith. Now THAT was very curious. I only told him that one does not reveal a good source of knowledge, and he should know it the best. He expresses inability to help me in this regard, but offered update on construction of new production facility.

For now, there were new plasma reactors setup and all power wiring has been completed. Superstructure of new manufactorum was 38% complete so new production lines were already in initial phase of construction. However, due to manpower shortage, complex would be delayed by 6 days.

After we said goodbyes, I immediately called Marcus to ask him how did he know about new fabricator. He also didn't want to tell me, but I asked him politely not to play games with me, stating that knowledge of death of previous was supposed to be top secret, even to him. He was very adamant in denying to know anything about any death of anyone. I expressed my assumption that his son might have had something to do with it, so he should be cooperating, which made him just hang up. I tried calling him 3 more times, up to no avail. And then I understood what Reitziger said about de Estana . . . that he was finished already. In light of all what happened in past weeks I could understand that holding onto information is just survival tactic, but Marcus might have just as much admitted guilt.

I called Maroo to send investigation team to de Estana, ordering to bring him alive even if they had to kneecap his legs in the process. Without informing why, I put it as priority sortie and ordered to keep it secure from ANYONE except for assembled team. Not even officers or anyone outside chosen squad. Until case



was resolved, it was supposed to stay between him and me. And Frederick if need truly be.

I knew Marcus was a helping hand to von Rosette, and that he was deep into the conspiracy, probably in the cult, but . . . assassination of Forgeworld's fabricator? I forgot how people like him got to point of power in first place. I overlooked his involvement due to how helpful he has been so far, but it seemed that his luck just run out.

Few minutes later, Commissar knocked to my door. It didn't sit right with him that I would send out a hunting party after someone, not to mention wealthiest man. Before telling him about incident with Mechanicus, I asked what did he know about their situation. Apparently not much more than what Kaifas would share with him, us. He let out a small sigh and relaxed. He thought it was something personal or a double cross or some other politics play. In that case, he proposed to bring him to High Command instead to Central Command, not to rouse any suspicions yet. He would arrange with Huges a place for de Estana and made sure he was kept intact before I arrive. As he walked out, I prompted him about how our techpriests were doing. Only thing he knew was that all 3 were currently being examined by sororitas. Asked him to notify me when they finished.

So I waited for a word with tea in my hand. My thoughts were racing to dig deeper, based only on frivolous assumptions I could infer from little knowledge uncovered about this whole case. Suddenly, this . . . chaos cults and Drukhari, Orks and pirates started to paint broader picture of powers at play. I needed that little information from Kitlana to put situation inside Sororitas order into greater frame. It consumed me so much, that I haven't even noticed when it was already past dinner time.

Due to skeleton crew present, staff was so scarce that not even cooks were allowed in. Emmy and her little crew had prepared some simple dished they knew how to, apologizing for bringing me such poor meal, but I appreciated their effort. In stroke of luck, Frederick called me about techpriests right after I finished eating.

This time, guarding sisters became scarce. Sounds of clunking metal and conversation echoed in the passage. Most doors in the corridor were completely closed, two open. My point of interest had its entrance completely opened wide. On my way in, one of helping acolyte sisters almost run into me carrying out vials of . . . closely undefined substances and jars filled with Emperor knows what. Some metallic parts, scrapings, metal shaving, oculi, gems, some mushy substances . . . gross stuff.

I excused myself and asked to speak with techpriestess. Hospitaler, from behind curtained door frame, directed me to another chamber few doors away. I knocked before entering to only get yelled at by coming without permission. But as techpriestess turned around from above mobile bed, upon which lied dissected corpse of a male, she calmed her tone, telling me to shut the damn door and not stand there in the middle. It turned out, her real "designated name" was KIT- L4-NA, but everyone called her Kitlana for simplicity.

White mantle of medic was bloodied from head to toe. Red insignia of Mechanicus on her chest barely visible. As I sat on the stool near window, her dendrites finally stopped poking needles into the body. Only after she stopped



working on the corpse and turned to me I could see how her body was . . . cyborgized with mechanized implants. It didn't look like normal mechanized contraptions of Mechanicus, though. More, or rather less hectic, eeeeeeeee . . . less disfigured, the tubing was not so much visible, neatly organized. Whole plating built into feminine shape. Her faceplate looked like it was made out of . . . porcelain, somewhat pleasing to the eye. Even back harness wasn't so bloated. Her voice, even if artificial, still remained somewhat human like.

Two servo skulls scanned me. One was your typical data terminal, while other looked like amalgamation of optical instruments with welter of wires.

Only when she stood before me, I noticed she had armored gloves on her . . . mechanized arms with body shape stylized over sororitas' armor, displaying sisterhood insignia on breastplate. All covered with splash of blood. Just like entire floor of this room. And windows.

She was very curious why governor would like to meet with her, or was Kaifas not up to the task. Trying my best not to sell him short, I begun to question her about state of corruption she had found in my people, gazing at the corpse.

Apparently the man wasn't corrupted but nigh uncooperative and served as reminder for others about why there was no escape from judgment. As to actual deviations from human genome, I was the only one about whom she was concerned. On the other hand, she applauded my action undertaken against chaos cult and my swift reaction to involve sisters so early. But . . . she felt through my elevated cortisol and adrenaline readings I wasn't here for actual report. I asked her if we could talk in private on some very sensitive matter. She assumed it was about my "manly flesh parts" and led me to next room, sitting me in the surgical chair while she prepared her tools. Without even trying to take place, I outright said I know she knew about Synthia's treachery and didn't tell order anyone about her. Momentarily, plasma pistol on her harness and myriad of blades on dendrites prepared to attack. Scalpel she held in hand was already in striking position. But before she made one step too close, I encouraged her to think before making a silly mistake of attacking me, assuring I only tried to get some information, not judge her decisions.

She wasn't thrilled. Lock on the door behind us clamped and interface vanished out of holograph. She wanted proof I was trustworthy, but we both knew there wasn't anything I could produce at the moment to prove anything. Eventually, she trusted readings of servos, calmed down and retracted hostility. I wanted to know story of how she knew that Synthia was treacherous and what happened to her after we brought her to the monastery.

Kitlana stared with sure statement, convinced Synthia wasn't dead. In fact, she knew that Janna put her back into living quarters, albeit locked under a key. She wasn't even made repentia or faced any major consequence. Only few sisters still knew she had done horrendous things. From what she knew, only 12 were aware. I questioned why she was locked in her own room. Apparently because Janna knew that someone would be searching for her in the dungeons. She didn't know who that someone was. And celestians who saw Synthia confess sins were taken to the front line by canoness herself. Leonida was the only one left in charge who knew about it. Every other sister was fighting Orks. I assumed nobody knew that Kitlana knew or otherwise she would be disposed of as well. According to her, it was very hard to hide this knowledge, especially when its effect was so prevalent all around world.



I was told that Synthia had multiple accomplices within order who vanished in mysterious circumstances in past year. Once she had no one to turn to, she made a mistake of asking Kitlana about certain procedures connected to making a space marine. Exactly the same specimen I was fighting on my arrival. It made her curious why would person who never exhibited interest in anything outside faith preaching, suddenly develop angle for such complex knowledge. She followed her around as much as could be done without rising suspicions and even asked her long friend, fabricator KIT-4E, about access to templates of genetic creation. As Magos Genetor, she was granted that access and shared it with Kitlana. By providing Synthia drips of knowledge she managed to trace her involvement with secretive and unsanctioned genetic laboratory under broadcasting center. Instead of alarming appropriate security forces, she decided to work it out on her own.

With one question at a time, she managed to ask her what kind of project she was involved in. Answer shocked her, as she explained how she could put greatness of space marines into her battle sisters. Few months before my arrival she begun infiltration to the facility, managing to hack into underground network and peruse framework of some research. She had no idea what was it about, but she found out about a private corporation operating this facility. From that moment she knew someone had turn traitor or heretic. On her own, she followed all avenues she could, but hit a wall when gathering information about operations on sisters.

I asked if that is what killed fabricator, which perplexed her immensely how could I even know about it. I said I had good informant.

She confessed that it was only partial reason. When fabricator received message about possible heretek blasphemy, she immediately investigated it on her own, in secret from other Artisans, communicating only with Kitlana due to long lasting friendship. She decided to screen each and every craft of Mara, building starport Delta as gift of cooperation between Lokinyth and Mara. It monitors every ship's telemetry data. What killed her was finding out someone modified some freighters in place outside available patrolling routes. She sent out little exploratory fleet but they stopped responding when reached system IIU - 8, which is too far away from patrol routes to check upon it. Someone on forgeworld caught wind about it, and in effect - silenced her for good.

Conclave decided to keep whole situation quietly under wraps, making sure that nobody would know about power transition. I asked her who can know about new fabricator, and she got angry about how I knew about such secretive things. I . . . decided to say that de Estana told me about it. For her, it meant that he had to be in cohort with new fabricator Schootex. Anyone beneath Magos was told that KIT-4E left position to pursue her call of exploration.

I asked her what where her interrogation skills. She said it depended on what I needed. After revealing Marcus was about to be hauled in to High Command she understood and declared it would be east to extract from him everything, up to the bone marrow if she was allowed. It felt personal to her, how those rats blasphemed against Omnissiah with heretek as well as murdering his most faithful servant. We made a deal which we sealed with a handshake. Kitlana would arrive no matter where or when I made the call.

After that, I made my way to Central Command to hasten up Maroo's efforts, alleviating to some level secrecy behind this sortie. We sent Mastaf,



Kimbly and Ojik at the helm of additional 3 more troopers. During debriefing prepared for them, none was surprised to hear what kind of suspicions de Estana fell under. Maroo was so angry he couldn't believe how easily he got blinded by his "charitable donation" efforts to our cause. He felt responsible and asked for permission to go into the field to set it right. Since HQ was paralyzed anyway, there wasn't any reason to hold him back. Boys immediately cherished the thought. Mastaf was excited to work with Maroo "like old times". To avoid suspicions, they took Valkyrie from officer landing pad to High command where Huges would equip them for mission. For time being, I took over direct control of Central Command. Fortunately not much was going on. The only hurdle was to provide Karnak with appropriate directives. All technical issues were dealt with by officers.

While speaking to Karnak via comms, I touched subject of our commanding cadre. It seemed like he knew what he was doing, warranting my appraisal of his skills. He humbly accepted my appreciation, but described dire need of field officers like lieutenants or majors. Overall commanders. There were plenty of soldiers and sergeants who didn't know a second thing about battle and had no one to lead them. Their overwhelming numbers had little effect on mercenary forces of Blacklight. He himself couldn't tend to everything on front line and specially not training grunts. Suggested that I could sent some of those forces from capital. He understood that city was already overtaken and could use some of their experience.

I forwarded this idea to colonel on duty, Desion. A funny guy for a veteran. With brief glance he estimated there were around seven hundred officers capable enough we could send to Karnak. If we designated more senior officers to lower rank roles, we could double that number.

While I waited in Maroo's office, we had call from mechanicus about training equipment. There was call from southern line for more supplies. We even had call from Borrod himself, asking if we could lift marshal law within Elkor. I consulted with Hashir and then approved. Presence of sisterhood was more capable of taking care of public unrest than our tanks.

I oversaw change of shifts at 23 hours and left post myself.



— Arrival Day [123] — Pursuit day [109] — Day of reign [77_] —

Since sisters still performed their audit, I spent all next day on browsing through economical data of Mara to gain some more in-depth knowledge about our industry. Most of reports were in good order but some happened to be contradictory or outdated. Scribes had to increase employment by half to keep up with new demands placed upon process of clarification and straightening out data, which was held incomplete during Amschel's reign. There were even entries of few Logis techpriests helping with archived data. And those were very incomplete, especially the nobility bloodlines and their businesses. To cover up their tracks, SoS destroyed whole libraries of documentation connecting any of the participating houses to doings of the cult. Even though there was no direct evidence, scribes have recreated parts of the dealings by looking into corresponding data from period, like wealth transfers, requisition rates, merchant lines and corporate acquisitions.

They even issued requests to other planetary governments to help with the situation, buuuuuuuuuuuut . . . bureaucracy. It would be nice if they even get a declining response in half a year. You know how it is. First, a local brach of administratum has to make approval request to planetary government, wait for confirmation from mechanicus, access archives, process data, compile data and only then get a response about "inquiry not existing in database". And begin the whole circus with another sentence. And so on for years, until scribe responsible for contact dies.

Since Blacklight's secession statement and their attacks on supply fleet, many planets reported chasing after their corporation on their soil. Even Lokinyth had discovered a secretive operation in their backyard, stealing what was left of their resources. After throughout investigation, they managed to destroy seven cells in their system. Still, no official statement would touch change of fabricator.

And since Sisterhood . . . cleaned out Ministorum palace, Multiple planets reported uncovering cult cells. Suddenly, there were chaos witches everywhere. Most of all, politicians begun to accuse their opponents of heresy. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh, you can imagine how people took advantage of it.

All covenants on all planets were emptied of every capable sister of battle to roll over population in search for heretics. Lots of people burned. Quite literary. Janna has dispensed order compelling every other Canoness to bring swift justice of the Emperor to everyone involved in cult practices. Wave of genocide swept through many worlds. In mere 3 days, statistics available to me indicated almost 1 000 000 people have died in pogroms all over subsector. Sisters were not fucking around.

From all organizations able to perform such actions, only sisters remained "pure" enough to judge others. Even ecclesiarchy on Cardinal World has been put to proper scrutiny. Arbiteres from administratum world had their hands full in their own investigations all over hive cities.

There was still no manifesto of persons slaughtered in infamous raid, but thanks to my own data I could piece where sisters struck the fiercest. Just like with our highest noble houses, whole damn sector performed throughout investigation upon all noble holdings. I made sure to allocate logistic as well as



military support to Order of Laurel Crown. We might have not been on best of terms right now, but there was no better opportunity to rid of the corruption.

In the evening, Frederick received information from Huges about our new prisoner who was fairly intact and on route. I waited for a moment, after he left, to inform Kitlana about Marcus, telling her meet me at officer quarter landing pad in 2 hours. I waited till last moment until we left high palace to inform Frederick about hospitaler accompanying us.

Before we could depart however, Greta visited officer quarters, stopping us from walking out to landing pad, to inquire me about this trip. She didn't like that we dared not to disclose specifics of military operations. Sisters were very vehement in their elucidation about my audacious indifference to their presence, not even recognizing authority of governor as highest or even meaningful. In her mind, me or Frederick were as any other serf, bound to their whims, I mean the Emperor, of course.

And then Kitlana arrived. Up to her sisters' surprise, "offering" to tag along me to make sure someone kept an eye on us. Greta . . . was either too daft or too indoctrinated to sense anything suspicious in her timely arrival. Or perhaps techpriestes had that much authority among sisters.

Our flight was very silent. Huges was positively surprised to meet interrogator Kitlana. Until then, we didn't know her real position. She worked as specialist prosecutor for sisterhood. Beatrice I met in St Basil dungeons was her trainee. And I instantly understood where did she pick up such disdain for fleshy things.

Percival asked her how she would rate my involvement in ongoing hunt. For her it was very satisfactory to have governor take matters so seriously, even if I had been suspicious due to my genetic makeup. Said I shouldn't be too afraid of incoming inquisitor or Lydia, as she has not been acting thoughtfully in last few days.

Frederick asked if this was due to cleansing. According to her, sisters were very deeply interconnected to each other, to the point of being a real family. Their bonds to each other only as great as devotion to the Emperor. To witness how part of family was used in such defiling masquerade was to incur their divine fury. She told us, in secret, that Janna had relocated most of sisters from fighting Orks to fighting cultist. She lied about attrition rate to governor Morgabius and was investigating his conduct of war even before cleansing. It seemed like he played incompetent general for purpose.

I asked if it was to drain sector of our real military force. And then she . . . pointed a finger of me and said "bullseye". Both commissars smiled on me. It was indeed rare to meet followers of Omnissiah behaving in such way. Before we entered command bunker, interrogator informed me that sooner or later, I would have to make trip to Riktus Prime to lend them my strength. It would be in my favor if I didn't wait for Janna's call or plea. Better to leave witch hunting to sisterhood and focus on other, broader threats.

We were met by newly promoted commodore, Ignaz Reinhart, who Kwintet delegated to oversee upcoming assault on Starport Gamma. He was now highest ranking officer on duty. Still, Huges was so entrenched into that place, not even admiral would dare to question his "advice". Just like I had Frederick to help.

My command squad waited for us in officer room, relaxing over cigars and



bottle of . . . whatever it was. It looked like alcohol. Prisoner was currently locked in cell B-1. Guys were happy to see us again. For once we could meet after a job well done.

From what they told me, Marcus had extensive bodyguard protection around his hidey hole in Villa Astra Rosa. They managed to avoid shootout by snatching one of his wives in garden and using her as bargaining tool, which made him surrender without any complaints.

Presence of sister interrogator alone put our boys into distress. They vouched that de Estana would willingly cooperate, explaining his cooperative stance, but I knew as much as Kitlana, it would take some bit of convincing him about our intended target.

Huges led us down to holding cells. Everyone tagged along. I didn't have anything against it. Maroo asked me to finally tell him what was this all about. What was so important that we had to resort to kidnapping him. He was suspicious how easy it was to get him in the first place with just 8 operators. And he didn't even resist.

Before we entered interrogation room, I gathered everyone into line to satisfy their curiosity and warn them about material so sensitive not even Cannonness superior knew. Everyone, with us included, were put into vow of silence until further notice, classified as cosmic 6 clearance level. All guards and servitors were removed from wing to make sure it stayed secret. Only me and her entered interrogation chamber. Rest moved to observation deck.

Two gates separated corridor and interrogation chamber. Tall and spacious inside. Arching vaults boasted various chains hanging from ceiling. Multiple floodlights perfectly lighted floor. Security booth inside was neatly built into wall, on the opposite side of tool wardrobe. We saw everyone in observation room above it. Its thick glass clearly reinforced with added protection of bars. Slanted walls made sure nobody would hide from their view.

Marcus stood upright, chained to wall behind him. His white wig missing, exposing balding, short, messy, gray hair. Bruise on his cheek and smeared outliner. Curly mustache flopped and disarrayed. Clothes dirty, golden vest darkened due to mud and dirt. Arm of his shirt torn off, slight cut on his skin. His bright self missing. His eyes filled with remorse and sadness. There was understanding on his face.

As soon as we entered, he expressed desire of cooperation, knowing he fucked up very terribly and was very sorry. Kitlana disregarded his presence altogether and starter preparation of table with . . . eeeeeeeeeee . . . "interrogation tools" from security booth. Used her dendrites to grab multiple pieces through opening in window and begun to clean them with napkin in hands. Servo skull chanted rite passages from their Book of Faith, which local covenant used as . . . something like holy book of psalms and prayers of thanks. While she sterilized pieces in purple flame, Marcus begun to fall into despair, wriggling and hopelessly convincing me that tools will not be necessary. That he will tell us everything without need of violence. That he will be a good boy and never tell a lie gain. He swore on thousand different things that he is still loyal to me. Tried to look as pitiful and emphatic as possible. Even dropped to his knees to beg me to hear him out. But . . . I was just standing. My arms crossed. And my eyes full of indifference. He rolled me over twice now, even though I stretched out a helping



hand to him. Once or twice is kind. Three of four is blind . . .

I waited in silence until interrogator finished.

It didn't impress her anymore than me. As soon as tools have been prepared, one of her servo arms pulled chain hanging on high ceiling, which lift his fettered hands up, almost carving steel cuffs into meat. He yelled out of pain and out fear. Chain contracted enough to leave him with enough clearing to stand on toes, almost crying while begging me to remember his nobility rights. Ehhhhhh . . . funny . . . Kitlana cut his wailing with denial. "Heretics have no rights".

She stepped closer. After next 2 steps lights turned off, leaving one floodlight illuminating his body in center of room. I stood on the opposite side and was a bit worried myself, seeing how her menacing shape barely broke out of black background. This harnas looked like monster ready to flay him alive, barely catching any light. Only ending tips with murderous tools glimmered in light. Her normal faceplate changed for interrogator visage. A silver skull embedded with inquisitorial seal on its forehead and carvings of holy rites all over. I already knew where this was going. Two menacing glows in her eyes with added effect of what I assumed was smoke, lighted in red, slowly flickering out of eye sockets reinforced his feeling of impending doom.

Two of six arms grabbed his head. He panicked so much he pissed in pants. One of arms with radial saw begun to rotate and close distance to his chest as two of other, needle blades, begun to slice two vertical lines through his forehead all the way to hairline. He tried shouting and begging to stop but it meant nothing to her. She did not make it swift on purpose. Gush of blood begun to flood his eyes. forehead wounds are very nasty bleeding wounds. After that, she used dipper to pour few drops of some kind of ointment from vial in her hand, which made his wounds to burn and blacken skin around those wounds. It begun to blister. He frantically screamed in terror, pain and panic, trying to slip out of dendrites.

After few more seconds, she finally let him go. I gave her a nod to let loose chain a bit and let him drop. And he did. Down to the floor, writhing in pain, curling himself into a ball, weeping and begging, promising to tell everything. For moment, we let servo skull finish reciting purify passage before we begun to ask questions. For first, she wanted to know what part did he play in murder of Fabricator KIT-4E.

Without hesitation he would deny any direct involvement in her death.

She asked how did he even know fabricator was female.

He spoke hastily how he would talk with von Rosette about her because of constant denial of his requests for increased fleet production, always stating his merchant fleet was already saturated and complete. She wouldn't even take his gifts in form of mine outputs of entire colonies. He wanted to overcompensate by margin as high as five times but was always turned down. It was only when Amschel came into power, Ervin could use him to legally order more ships. Mines of Marcus served as resource supplier for this endeavor. He set him up as mining monopolist. It was only after the wars, Society of Sovereign was joined by more people from other planets and his mining monopoly broke down, but he stayed on top, still being of greatest use.

She yelled to get back to the question asked, not his life story, while yanking rising chains. He apologized in yells of pain.



Kitlana renewed question about murder.

Marcus would adamantly decline charges of participating in it. Neither him or von Rosette had enough influence in Mechanicus to even ask directions at manufactorum, not to mention arrangement of fabricator's death.

I then questioned why he was glad when new fabricator was chosen and why did he talk about him as "his guy". Hearing this, interrogator pulled chain hard enough to make him stand up once again. Her voice modulated into low tonnes, came closer to ask very menacingly, why would Shchootex be "his guy". I then added that he managed to order freighters outside normal schedule. Her gaze remained razor focused on him, who couldn't look away from her hooded visage despite dozen of blades twirling around his body. It was like fear paralysis.

Without even prompting, he explained that he supplied resources to build von Rosette's secret gantry on Ophelia VII, where he built him new ships, but after secession happened, Artisan cut off his involvement with order since he had what he wanted. And because Marcus was properly aligned with official authority, they made behind the door deal to supply him with metals in exchange for cutting into the line.

She asked him, since when heretek supplied SoS. He begged her understanding as he didn't know what that is. Instead, Kitlana asked him what kind of technology were they using to build their ships.

It wasn't in his knowledge. Even when she twisted some of the blades in to exposed arm pits, he screamed hectically that he didn't know. Retracting blades looked even more painful than inserting them. I asked her to not to end him prematurely, but she rebutted me not to worry, because she knows how to handle a heretic.

De Estana swore he was no heretic, that he had no knowledge about how his son disposed of family wealth. Her gaze turned to me but I rolled over my eyes letting out a sigh. One of servo arms reached for another chain which loosen up tension again, falling him to ground in free fall slam. His moans started to grow longer but dimmer and quieter.

I reminded him, that we already knew how his family operated and warned about playing games with me for third time. After we gave him 2 minutes to calm down, she questioned him about man named Jacob. She knew he was helping him, lending a hand in his plans and implying he knew what heretek is, as he himself transported them on board his luxury liner. Once again, he begged not to hurt him anymore, promising to tell everything.

Apparently, Jacob was lexmechanic helping Artisan Schootex in setting up assassination of KIT-4E and one of Society's top dog, helping Reitziger in building outposts all over sector, but Marcus's mining guild only transported materials and workers, never taking part in actual building of anything.

And then she asked who is Reitziger. Something, which sent chills down my spine.

According to Marcus, there was not much known about him anyway. Only few people in organization knew his residing location. He was known for making best clone merchandise in the galaxy. She wanted to know where did he get his knowledge. He couldn't tell her, but before she did something again, I assured he couldn't know and I would tell her later about it.

Kitlana directed her questions to uncover how could he have supported



assassination, but it looked like he was just useful tool after all. One thing she couldn't forgive him however, was trafficking her sisters for pleasures of the wicked. Yet before she engaged all her tools, he begun to speak about how he was forced into it, that he knew all locations, and he knew where black sites were setup. He swore he could tell us everything if we let him live.

I asked techpriestess to walk out with me for moment. We walked into security chamber, cut off from both Marcus and rest of our guys. She even reassured me there was no one who could have overheard us there.

I informed her there was better way to handle it. She could not comprehend I would even think about letting this slide unpunished, but I had better idea, reminding her of my psyker powers, and mind reading. She admitted this resolution was indeed most effective, but I should be careful because sacred oil she poured on his wounds were Lilian Tears of Dominica, a very "classified" compound, used in purification of warp parasaites from valuable personnel and it reacted very violently on his skin. I continued to look at seal on her forehead.

Her stance changed for a time. Being well aware of extension of my powers, she admitted my person to be extremely well composed, even in most dire situation. Most of all, I didn't panic when I saw her interrogator face and inquisition seal. She praised my silence and not questioning her presence. She didn't want to let me mind read de Estana, because she suspected he was infested already. She resorted to traditional methods, knowing that there is something within him, that I should not come in contact with.

I told her, that since she was an acolyte then she should know what I was about to tell her, but then . . . she confessed she wasn't mere acolyte and . . . pulled her dwarfish tinderbox out of her side pocket, exposing inquisitorial rosette. This . . . rubbed me very wrongly. This time I froze in disbelief. So much that servo skull detected hormonal cocktail spike within me. Kitlana tried to calm me down, assuring that despite being different, she deemed me helpful towards Emperor enough to let it slide. My allegiance to the humanity was enough of a proof.

Despite having no idea how or why would I even know about inquisitorial regalia and being psyker so potent enough to trash a Warhound titan with one lance, she would not poke questions about my past and asked that I did the same.

I just nodded in understanding. Before we moved further, she warned me that inquisitor coming with black ships was a Lord Inquisitor Markovic. Suspecting I was very worried about their approach, she guaranteed no harm would come to me as long as my government cooperated in his research.

Without moment of hesitation I said with confidence that they were hunting for black grimoire, AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAND . . . once again she readied all her tools to claw at me, grabbing collar of my coat, demanding to know, in hysteric fury, how did I even know of its existence.

I told her that . . . it was my job to know. She hung up on those words, now interrogating me. I couldn't just tell her story of my life there and then so just like she promised not to ask questions, I promised it was better she didn't know because she wouldn't believe anyway. After my initial reaction to her status, servo skull didn't detect any change, which impressed her even more, being both, very angry and very curious to meet someone like me. She even joked that she could have fallen for me were I not so . . . "different".

I just summarized that world has put me into worse places than one could



imagine. She finally let go of my coat and promised we would come back to this subject, but now interrogation was more important. If my powers were so disciplined and great, she would let me one attempt to look into him. Before we walked back again, I asked who really does know of her presence. She just said that no one, not even me and showed the exit with her dendrites.

Marcus sobbed on the floor, curling onto himself. He begged not to hurt him anymore and just make his death quick. I told him to stand up but he was too tired. Kitlana pulled chain to lift him up.

I took off my gauntlet and put hand on his forehead. Something immediately started to pull me out of my body. A very dark and menacing presence. Pure malice. Hunger. Desire. Insatiable desire. And a tint of purple...ish, pink nebula. I know that scent very well – warp Daemon.

My hand seemed to drop by itself as soon this dark energy reached me. Sister wasn't surprised at all. She could assume as much herself and prodded me to try dive into him, under her watchful eye. Her attitude changed into more careful. It wasn't anymore techpriestes hospitaler but full blown interrogator inquisitor with paranoia. I had to watch my words not to slip anything suspicious, keeping everybody in observation deck from this one specific knowledge.

Well . . . Since I had to enter immaterium, the very home and hunting ground of that ravenous thing, it was unsettling to see just how many parasites latched onto him. Only after those were dealt with, his mind became clear enough to dive in.

I saw all his . . . existence, since childhood. Depraved at the age of 8 by his own mother at black altar, witnessing sacrifice of his younger sister to perversity of Slaanesh cult. Groomed to be next heir at age of 17, by completing sacrifice of his own father at behest of his mothers. Throughout his whole life, he served those mothers as plaything, supplying trafficked people, acquired as contract workers for his mines, delivered into their dungeons instead.

He himself took part in all those cultist black masses, tossing his own daughter at one of such events to feed her to cultists. I saw one of those very clearly - Krietlig himself, even before he became cardinal. As someone in power, he could help de Estana in business and politics in exchange for inexhaustible sources of ecstasy. All his life revolved around servitude to filling desires of the elites like him. Together with von Rosette, shipped people all over sector to feed debaucheries of the cult . . . with overbearing majority of ecclesiarchy involved in rituals. As I glided through those memories, he hastily tried to shell off one particular time, which I shattered without mercy.

Two people sitting in garden of de Estana mansion. Marcus and his mother Erika. Then . . . SIN appears to them in company of “others”, promising great riches for a job well done. I . . . saw him, but . . . he was behind, aaaaaaaa . . . fog? I couldn't make out his face. But the feeling of great reverence and irresistible charm felt overbearing.

And then evening, night and black altar. Their first sacrifice. SIN is there, watching over it. Reveling in it. He is tall, slender. Hooded. His black mantle almost “glowing” with darkness. Screams of his victims filling cave they resided in. And he . . . smiles? To him. I can't see his face, but I felt he was smiling to Marcus, who now cried on the floor, after slicing sister's throat with weird coral covered knife. I don't know this design. He takes a look at her nude, bloody body,



to then slice himself as sign of servitude.

And he pulls me throughout whole world in great grief. I see Marcus grow up. He is traveling stars in his luxury cruiser. His daughter is being . . . sacrificed and abused by his own son. One of his wives joins them upon altar. SIN is there as well, chanting something as little girl is being cut to pieces by her family. All of it while he and his associates “exploit” other slaves.

I see what kind of life he led. Full of treachery and lies. Lies to his own self. Lies to everyone else. In vertical slit of his existence, everything was laid bare. I saw all the times he double crossed someone, or outright killed them in cold blood, because they posed a possible future threat. I saw how he was in this from very beginning with von Rosette, how they both exploited to no end their positions to climb to the top. I saw how many times they fought over something and then, how it all stopped when SIN left. He showed them how to apply all they had, to win political games. He showed them power they could incite by dark rituals. He showed them how to extract life of others to add to themselves, which hooked them instantly. They were the ones who spread it to the world. They corrupted clergy with dark promises to gain their support.

I saw how they multiplied in numbers, how they forwarded their agenda to other planets. Their conquest was just a beginning.

SIN needed more. He gave them power. Power to influence others. This . . . irresistible power of hypnotic, subconscious command that made weaker people go subservient and obeying no matter the command. I saw how he used it for pleasures and commanded assassinations to people unaware of those commands. I saw how they both used it. And then Edmund entered the stage to present SIN with his creation. It was first and last time he ever seen him in person. Both of them were sidelined, which made them hate Reitziger with burning passion. They looked at him as hand taking away food. SIN never shared his powers again. They had to rely on their own wits from there on, but since they were always told what to do, they had little experience in management of such vast empire. It started to crush down.

All this extreme abuse of population is result of their incompetence, because they sold their souls for power, never achieving foresight on their own. Bioroids, though extremely lucrative, were never seen as propitious merchandise, but necessary evil. They vowed never to touch any clone.

And then I saw what he was doing behind the scenes, trying to play both sides of conflict between Imperium and Blacklight. Or rather between me and von Rosette. At least he told us part of the truth about his dealing. Yet he omitted all concerning how he kept on delivering missing shipments to our enemy and all scheming he done with Schootex on board his liner.

It was very choppy. Marcus tried to fight me, but he couldn't. I wouldn't let my grip off his spirit. Then, this dark entity lashed out its hatred on me, trying to consume me with very powerful burst of darkness. So much that I had to let go of further reading his mind and focus on defending myself. After pushing it back, enough to glimpse few words saying “they needed more souls for the ritual”, this inter dimensional predator thrown itself all at me with seemingly infinite avalanche of power. It was best to just pull out and not fight it.

When I came back to the realspace, de Estana became more of a burnt cinder than flesh. His head charred and smoking, last strokes of hair still lit and



consuming like embers. body blackened from warp fire. His clothes melted into body. Whatever remained of meat was already fried to the bone. My hand was pasted with . . . whatever goo remained of skin.

My own body didn't feel as it was in any better shape.

On my right, in large pool of dark, purple blood, lied body parts of what looked like withering corpse of demonete, torn into multiple parts, illuminated by light coming from devastated door frame to the corridor. Pincer hands, pinkish skin dripping in blood, mutilated chest with lots of piercings. I didn't see legs. Once my senses came back, echo of gunfire and tall shouts rang in my ears. Growls of monsters being put down lessened as more and more bullets were shot. Frantic screams of people being torn and eaten mixed with yells of Frederick and Huges shouting orders in the distance, to concentrate fire on something. It all seemed like reaching me through fog.

My body was very sluggish as hit with a powerbat. I felt drained of power. Almost collapsing, barely keeping eyes open and overbearing desire to fall asleep right there, standing. As soon as I turned my head in attempt to see what was happening behind me, Kitlana caught me by wrist. I looked at her in confusion, unable to tell if I was in real world or not. She used hospitaler tools to check upon me at once. My eyes, ears, mouth, hands, even bones, checking responsiveness, while her servo skull performed multi wavelength scan of my body for presence of any infestation. She pulled my hand off corpe's head and sat me in security booth, dragging me all the way. Shootings stopped but yells of Huges did not. He conducted soldiers in fury. With ringing in my ears, I heard her voice like through a wall, listening in confusion. For moment, I slip away and got stabbed with one of her blade on my forearm. It effectively brought me back. She stuck some kind of syringe into it and then treated it with bandages.

As my senses begun to clarify, I started to piece together from shouts that there was warp rift opened. I asked her what was going on, to clarify situation. As she wiped my face with new sterilized cloth, I saw blood smeared all over it. By touching my head, I felt residual stickiness on my temple.

Only when my senses came back in full, I heard red alarm ringing through all the shouting and running in corridors. Frederick run into the chamber in company of our boys. He didn't look like happiness. More like rage manifest. With heavy breathing asked techpriestess, toning down, how was I doing. She said I had very minor rebound response for diving too deep into warp, but despite how it looks, body remained functionally alright. To ease tension, I added joke, that it was just a flesh wound and would heal by tomorrow. You can imagine it didn't land well.

After brief silence I asked Frederick, since sister did not respond, what was going on. Kitlana cut me off, explaining they should take me back to palace's apothecarium, but I was adamant in my questioning. She told commissar that my rest should come before putting focus on what happened. She would take care of my medical examination later, but for now we had to tidy up this mess. Frederick and Maroo acknowledged, promising to follow instructions, after which Kitlana rushed out. I asked them once again what happened, but Frederick decided he will tell me later, when we got back, outside sister's supervision.

I got up from chair with Kimbly's help. Only now I saw there were more demons torn to shreds than I initially registered. One, big, bloated carcass of fat



mistress demon, three snake like creatures ripped apart or . . . whatever remained of those. One has been partially splattered on security window. Something terribly disfigured hung upon shelf with torture tools. Portal frame of chamber marked with three giant tears stretching from side to side of whole chamber. This . . . carve was so deep I could see light shafts from surrounding rooms in few places.

Whole floor became flooded with dark liquid. My soles covered with purplish goo substance of whatever passed as demon blood, slowly withering away from realspace. Corridor leading to holding cells appeared to be in even worse shape. Blood splattered on walls. Rapidly rotting monster pieces laying all around. Human insides mixed with putrid demon meat. For each monster 12 or 13 soldier bodies, but once we walked out of wing, to main passages, it started to get ugly, like all out assault on base. Stacks of monsters withered out of reality, slowly turning into ash, but their blood still stained floors, remaining much longer. Corpses of defenders picked up by their fellow men and laid on sides of corridors in large stacks. Whoever remained sane that is. Most of people consisted of supporting personnel checking upon mental issues of survivors. Most of survivors turned psychotic, forcing Huges to cut their suffering.

Attack appeared very violent and very abrupt. Soldiers died in the same clothes they ate or slept in, holding all kinds of pipes, planks, bats, handguns, chainsaws and even brooms. Most of our men looked like emotionally strong enough, yet some were emotionally destroyed, weeping in front of body piles. I cannot blame them. Not everyone sees demons and gets to live through. Much less remains sane enough to live further. My worry was that . . . since they all did . . . all of them were marked for deletion anyway . . . And . . . I felt that I was the one to blame.

Grief. . . I felt only grief for my people. And painful sting in my chest that it was me who signed their death warrant. Sororitas would not let them live after witnessing the greatest taboo, inexcusable for inquisition.

Frederick led on front, pushing everyone aside as Mastaf held his eye on me. Soldiers cried in disbelief what they just fought with. Sergeants tried to keep their men from falling apart, but some of them were on brink of madness themselves.

I advised Frederick they must burn all of remaining monster parts as well as all soldiers killed by them, then cleanse anything that remained with fire and notify sororitas to perform cleansing rites. They had to get rid of last molecule of what cluttered floor.

After we left dungeon wing, I told him that all of soldiers who witnessed this . . . slaughter, had to be concentrated on one ship, preferably a disposal one and wait for "debriefing" from sisterhood. He wasn't sure how to interpret my words so I explained in very plain words, that if even him does not follow instructions, inquisition will cleanse everyone who witnessed the most guarded secret that is demon existence. Chaos cult is just a stupid cult. Everybody knows such lunatics exists, but manifestation of a demon . . . is near a death sentence for whole world. It was first time as I saw him reluctant to follow my order, but he followed disposal command. Then, he called Huges to tell him how what to do with all personnel included this occurrence. I added that ALL footage and even one mentioning sentence on any scroll of this event must be hunted and destroyed with extreme prejudice. This must never had happened or else inquisition will



erase it themselves. With us along. This struck fear into my squad. I calmed them down, assuring no harm comes to them as long as they follow my instructions. At the very end, I took my squad and both commissars to a secluded ammo storage in order to hammer in severity of this occurrence, sealing their lips forever on this matter under death penalty. We were never to talk about it again. Ever.

A: I know procedures concerning demon sightings.

A: No, I did hope nobody would have to take their lives if we did this right. I intended to send them to front lines and die with shred of dignity.

A: At first, yes, but . . . sisters didn't take chance, later purging whole transport and drifting it into sun.

Fortunately, everything was contained in just one wing. Huges lifted alarm, announcing via vox, that alarm training was complete and soldiers were to return to duties.

Before we left however, we needed to meet with commodore. My team was vehemently against it, but once I explained I know where Blacklight stashed appropriated stock, Frederick understood gravity of the situation. He sent everyone back to palace in fear they might spill the beans, but this I opposed, being convinced there was no better or safer zone than around me when it came to such things.

Despite all announcements, bunker was still in buzz. Reinhart tried to ask what has happened down there, but commissar definitively told him "nothing". And nothing will happen. No one asked questions afterwards. We proceeded to gist of my visitation. I disclosed slither of truth connected to attaining information about whereabouts of their base of operations. Trick lied in pinpointing those place. We had to piece together everything from snapshots of memory I saw, spending all night figuring it out



— Arrival Day [124] — Pursuit day [110] — Day of reign [78_] —

It was done when sun begun to rise at 5:12 in the morning. I remember this time very clearly. Huges took his duty utmost seriously, roaming all parts of whole High Command intimidating, informing and setting straight all accounts of what happened. He came from time to time to war room for consultation and dispositions. Voidsmen who tried to ask questions were instantly rebuked or punished. Some made example of. He finished procedure of gathering all who took part in the event around 7 in morning.

Since we finished "early", I decided to wait for admiral to discuss our current approach. Commodore pitched some ideas about possible reconstruction of wing formations. By time of early shift change at 7 local, I let Ignaz off duty.

Huges was insightful enough to brief admiral before he arrived, so we could focus on fleet management. Two frigate packs were already on the hunt since we sent signal hours ago, but it would take another week to completely sweep through designated area. In meantime, our fleet had to be put on offensive, not defensive, make our enemies panic and force mistakes. Firstly, I was getting impatient with Starport Gamma. What looked like easy pickings with new conscription numbers, looked more distant while I felt more pressure. Now even more, knowing there was inquisition already watching my back. With a bit of paranoia due to previous day happening, I tightened deadlines for this assault.

Avenger grand cruiser and two light cruisers were on route, performing sweeping duties on the way. I called them off to make sure they come to Mara as fast as possible, cutting arrival time by 3 days. Being only two jumps away, we had approximately two standard days before they arrived. I wanted all available fleet assembled and ready for their arrival, making sure we strike as soon as they reach system. Kwintet didn't like this one bit. Gamma wasn't a threat to our ships right now, just a guard dog for Blacklight, but It would indeed accomplish total domination over void space, which wasn't actually significant improvement from our current situation.

He politely questioned however, if this was best use of our forces. Gaze of Void could withstand torrent of fire for few hours, yet with lack of heavy support, like Basket of thorns, there was little chance of actual success, backing this up with merely two cruisers and six frigates in orbit. By the time we would drop their shields, all ships would be already knocked out of combat.

I told him that all they need is to drain their shields. Lightning strike would do the rest. Everyone, except for Frederick, voiced their opinion how unwise it would be to rely on this strategy. It would have taken 34 000 armsmen to overwhelm station internal defense. They tried to convince me with graphs and troop reports. Frederick was well aware I would try to suicide boarding anyway, no matter how much common sense they threw at me, advising from chair on the side. Without as much as blinking. Without expectations. Without remorse. Something changed his mind from previous time. I was too tired to explain anyone my plan or elaborate. I decided with stamp of authority and that was it. My tiredness probably clouded my judgment.

We returned to palace near 9 hours local. Sisters were still conducting their audit, albeit in lesser numbers. Most of staff returned to work. Any equipment



they setup was being dismantled and packed into cases. Only few battle sisters remained guarding order dialogus and famulous, still vetting few noble houses left. Clergy levels were still unavailable for entry.

People were surreptitiously looking at me as we passed through palace. I wasn't looking too fresh. Commissar told everyone that it was due throughout examinations under watchful gaze of Sororitas. Maroo tried to excuse himself to return to his duties but I categorically refused and had all of them return with me to my bedroom. Fearing they didn't register weight of this demon assault, I had to go through it all once again. This was some serious shit and there was no running away from its consequences if anyone caught wind of it, ever. And I finally could ask Frederick to tell me why sister Kitlana decided to keep everything from me. For sake of our privacy, Maroo and his men returned to their quarters. He even ordered two soldier sentries in hallway to cut off any entry to entire top level, making sure nobody would even eavesdrop from 100 meters. We went through incident step by step.

During our interrogation, storm troopers became deeply disturbed by how Marcus was treated by interrogator. They breathed in deeply, when I pulled Kitlana to security chamber. Maroo never saw or even imagined how Sisterhood performed their interrogations. Olsmo had to keep them disciplined. Commissars have already seen torture methods elaborate enough to melt their brains.

When we returned, all of them became nervous. When I put my hand on his head, Frederick had to explain how I am capable of reading minds.

As I was standing there, techpriestes walked around us, listening to wailings and pain strokes of prisoner. His moans turned to erratic and subconscious screams, yelling "no, please, no". Sister had to restrain his erratic shaking by wrapping in chains.

And then, bright spark of lightning illuminated chamber. Kitlana tried to pull me out of trance, fearing something happened on the other side, up to no success. It seemed like we both have been frozen in time. A moment later giant roar spread through air, inducing head splitting pain. As soon as it passed, they heard gunfire. Without moment of thought, all of them geared up with whatever was available at hand and rushed out. Cold fear froze them in place, as they witnessed horrendous creatures, monsters and . . . demons clawing their way through nebulous, cosmic cracks in walls.

Huges was first to slap them back to reality. At first, there was not much fighting, but those things just begun to materialize and assault. Most of men were caught by surprise, butchered where they stood. Percival raised red alarm, commanding all hands arm themselves and concentrate in sector D12, the dungeon sector. Hundreds died in just first minute.

Our team was defending passage to interrogation chambers with Kitlana, but were pushed out of main hub into wing. Huges was on front, smashing monsters with his pistol and power bat in augmented hand. As they begun to be overrun, Frederick rushed in front to push attackers out. Team stayed in corridor to defend. He did save Percival from certain death, walking out only with minor injuries, as for commissar of course, but sister was overrun. Demons however, weren't focused on her. Four soldiers at her side became dismembered like paper dolls, while she was pinned down by group of attackers.

In that moment, he understood it was all a play to open path to holding



cells. They tried to rush to my help but it was too late. Instead of trying to get through demons, they decided to bring down window in observation room, but they were too slow. As much as they tried to get through reinforced glass, cohort of demons broke off door to our holding cell. Something he accounted to stroke of luck, monsters did not attack me outright and stopped to roar at me. That is when a giant mist of darkness with wings, darker than blackest void, even more than black hole, appeared around me. Lights on the ceiling were on, but its burning blackness seemed to eat all the light and sap all the colors around. And consume all the life. He felt like loosing soul just by looking at it.

One sweep of what looked like clawed hand butchered all monsters in chamber, leaving the tear on walls inside. It let out dark and deep growl, like cosmic beast, echoing in very fabric of space like through water, resounding even in their minds and souls. It felt as it froze in motion everything until it lasted. Even time. Once resounding growl dissipated, this black fog, seemingly thick as tar, vanished like ash blown by wind.

Both him and Huges shook in fear. He admitted that it was first time in his life he ever was afraid of something. First time fear froze his tongue and legs. Percival wasn't in any better condition. Three soldiers who witnessed this thing along them, stood immovable. All their bodies looked like burnt to cinders. Flesh begun to turn into ash and fall apart like sand. Their equipment broke off. Clothes collapsed on themselves in puff on dust cloud.

In few seconds Kitlana came rushing to them. At this time, prisoner was already dead and burning with fire composed of pinkish fog. Once she saw them, quickly administered some kind of booster and a gob smack, which relaxed their bodies, returning to real space. After her servo skull did some scanning, she viciously commanded to speak what did we they see. Not wasting any time after that, telling them both to destroy any remaining demons and start cleansing procedures. Moment later, rifts in walls closed. When they finally killed last of remaining demons, he rushed to see how was I doing.

I saw how his body shivered, while telling me this. His expression was rock solid. His posture steadfast, but I saw shake of his muscles. He became restless. I almost heard his voice falter asking "what the actual fuck are you anyway".

I felt tired and sagged in that chair. Rays of perfect blue sky warmed my face, guiding my thoughts into depths. At the same time, I felt how my other self chuckled inside, while Frederick told this story. He never, EVER, shows up in physical world unless it directly benefits him. He knows that I could just heal up, even if miasmed by demons. I even regenerated after a deathstrike.

I felt his icy touch. He grazed my . . . astral body. With tip of his claw being utmost careful not to damage me. . . mocking me . . . breaking me . . . he was . . .

I . . . I-I . . . was never going to tell anyone about it . . .

All I could offer Frederick was to say that my existence is not just my own. Explained that it's not demon or otherwise sisters had already tried to exorcise me. I told him time and time again that he cannot understand, or even begin to imagine, what lied inside me, being in part source of this power. It was perhaps too much for his mind.

Olsmo was very upset that I never told him. Very mistrustful to believe anything I had to say anymore. Walked around table, restless, and very close to pulling out his pistol to shoot me, but given few minutes, his anger subsided. We



talked over my lies and what else was made up about me. Then spent a lot of time in silence. It made me drift away a little bit. I saw how he watched me carefully. Gazed in suspicion at my every move. Every breath. He finally sat in chair, keeping his watchful attention on me. I had no idea what he was planning, but I advised it took much more to wear me out. He couldn't count on my exhausted cooperation just yet.

Our silence broke ringing of his PDA. He looked at its display for a moment, tapped something on keyboard and got up. I heard steps in hallway. Very distinctive steps of cuffed, armor plated stiletto boots. Many boots.

I just waited. Closed my eyes and wondered if that neared the end of my limelight. Short as it was, at least I made it meaningful.

Few voices outside spoke too quietly to make out what was going on. One of those voices was distinctive caster of Kitlana. It seemed inquisition came for me prematurely. I hoped to be gone by time they arrived, but alas . . . I could only imagined she explained some procedures to her sisters. The delay was killing me. This suspense . . . I couldn't even think, just waiting and waiting, watching how clock ticked second by second. One minute dragged into ten and yet . . . it came so suddenly.

Frederick opened the door. Only one person came through. I felt something like stasis field engulfing our space. A thing akin to gellar field, just far less potent. They probably tried to limit my powers. One of sisters read some statistics on her display, informing techpriestess how spectroscope still picked up reading from my presence undiluted. Apparently sanctified threads of holy banner of Mara still picked up warp charge.

Sound of relocated heavy equipment rolled over the floor. Wheels of big cart. Steps of heavy armor. Multiple steps of heavy armor. Very heavy armor. I . . . pffffffffffffffffffff . . . only watched sky outside, awaiting hell to break loose. At this time, my body was too tired to fight.

Kitlana came in. Door closed behind her. Unmistakable clang of her tendrill harness came closer and closer. Servo skull floated in front of me, scanning with reddish rays of its oculus apratatus. Usual flame missing from its crown chalice, but adorned now with multitude of purity seals. One on the back, as big as writing scroll. Another drone equipped with vox casting system hovered over us. It even had a pleasant feminine voice.

I felt . . . dissappointed. Not because of persecution, but because I would loose my best shot at helping this world. A wasted opportunity. No matter the power they could muster, not even inquisition posed threat to me. Not even their weapon or fancy gadgets, not even Grey Knights are enough, but . . . she could easily chase me away with one command. For love of the Emperor, I would surely just run away again, instead of causing another scene . . . but I know they would just chase me down, burning everything on their path as long as they believed I was infested . . . the best way to avoid another catastrophic loss of life was just play along for now. They would much more gladly repopulate entire sector than risk spreading chaos any further.

Frederick stood behind my chair. Aura of confusion, disappointment and mistrust. The feeling of uneasiness. He felt betrayed by me. Kitlana however, was very calm. Normal. Business as usual, without any blockages or strains in her, already tattered, energy nexi. She removed table in front of me, brought one chair



closer to sit against me. Powered off tool drone, letting it lie on the table.

I sat silent, looking at her white mantle, now sparkling clean. Almost gleaming of snow whiteness. Red trim over hood woven of red, metallic thread mixed with adamantium coins depicting cult mechanicus. Onyx gloves polished to mirror perfection. Sororitas emblem on top of gauntlet palm now radiating with silver luster. Wearing faceplate resembling battle helmet and red necklace around her neck, crowned with hospitaler emblem.

She broke silence asking with unusual voice, which sounded very unhealthy, how was I feeling today. I tried not to be snarky and go along her play. She walked clos to me. Dendrites aimed at me some kind of devices. One shining light in my eyes. One scanning me, one touching my face with a steely ball. One of arms brought to my eyes some kind of ocular screen pulsating with quick bursts of green noise. She grabbed my arm and stuck needle, drawing sample of blood, instantly sliding vial into her Narthecium. Something clicked and gave steady, hissing sound and then a flatsound. With vigor in voice, she let me know my DNA remained reasonably human, despite exposure to warp element.

Without breaking character, pulled from under her coat scribe hardboard with pen, passing it to me. Started our conversation by expressing "deep concern over my health in absence of my usual Magos". She tried to put up a show for everyone behind the door, who could possibly hear us, while displaying set of questions on her examining tool, which looked like rectangle hologlass with a handle. Magos usually used it to x-ray via various layers tissues and structures in body in medical examination. She clearly had ulterior motives. I couldn't see Frederick's expression but his confusion grew instead of anger.

First thing she wrote was command to just focus on her writing and disregard speech. Her vox box was just running rutine. I needed not respond with sense to her voice, only to respond at all. We begun to write how should I present my answers, what kind of manner or paragraph, etc. Commissar relocated to stand next to us, as to see both of us . . . corresponding.

Of course, she could display her question instantly while I wrote everything on paper. Ehhhhhhhhhhhh . . . I knew dangers of such out of context statements, written in person, without any backup or security but what was I supposed to do . . . Once we went through procedure, she reminded me again to speak out something from time to time.

For starters, she asked me what did I see inside de Estana's mind, so I reported everything without omitting a word. It took me half an hour to write it down, another half to respond to complementary questions. In my writing fervor, she reminded me to talk back. Frederick watched over us immovable like stone, only rolling his eyes from person to person.

Kitlana remained dead locked onto whatever attacked me on the other side. In this dry method of emotionless attachment I couldn't figure out any of her approach. She kept asking same question time and time again in different configuration. We spent another hour hammering down this one exact part alone.

Once we had this issue behind us, she questioned me how and why did I know about "thing she almost decapitated me for". Had she not been an inquisitor, even if Lord of Terra, I wouldn't hesitate to lie, but in this situation . . . This was the moment commissar averted his head for moment, which was enough to catch her attention, immediately posing him series of yes/no statements, while I wrote



my answers down, using only nods or swipes of his head.

Her quiescent personality changed again, as she burst something out of her vox in binary, seeing how I mentioned Kaifas and grimoire in one sentence. Her insatiable hunger for knowledge drove my arm to exhaustion up till point she allowed me to use her tool to write. Unfortunately, I wasn't in shape to freely use powers at this time, even as small as controlling a pen.

In the end, we left no dry thread on Kaifas' name, telling her everything. From long time ago, how he became Magos, how he helped SoS, used heretek, his discovery of KIT-4E and transgression into vault and everything he told us about.

First thing after we were done, she let us know that Kaifas was dead. Found dismembered in his laboratory few days ago, just a day before conclave was about to choose new fabricator. I grabbed my head in disbelief of this political mess. She had to remind us about procedures.

She strictly forbade us to tell anyone we shared this. A secret meeting between Kwintet, Maroo, Huges and us had to be arranged at once. Frederick doubted if she had the authority to command such thing, until she pulled out her Inquisitorial Rosette from secure pocket, under chestplate. He paled out and complied at once, walking to the end of the room, under windows and making calls, keeping minimum level of sound.

In meantime, her caster skull still issued medical examination checks list questions, spouting litanies of purification from time to time.

I guess she waited for Frederick to go away and as soon as he turned around, she posted question about what was the dark thing which saved me. That . . . wasn't something I could reveal even to inquisitor, so I asked her to be patient and to resume it another time, another place where absolutely nobody or anything would ever overhear us, because even space-time has ears. She pushed further her questioning, but I denied it. She knew it was not a warp entity as all tricks up her sleeve did not work on it, neither did I ever had any advert response to sacred rites or oils. At that time, I could offer only a slither of truth. It wasn't source of my power, but . . . it was a part of my power. It wasn't dictating my life, but it was , is, indeed a part of me that cannot be removed, least both of us die. Even if 'die' is relative term to . . . him, it . . . whatever you want to call it.

I begged her to be understanding for now, not jumping on the idea of persecution and just letting me help. This brought up issue I said earlier, that "it was part of my job to know". This had to be clarified and would not take no for an answer.

I didn't lie this time. There was need to. Our interests aligned. She, as inquisitor chased most gruesome enemies of mankind and I wrote, that I am what Grey Knights could never have become. And this . . . made her jaw drop, figuratively. I felt her steady aura changed into . . . like you offend someone, bitchsalp them in humongous hubris, putting down and make them feel miserable. Part disbelief, anger and confusion. Even arms of her harness sagged a little. For moment, all movement seemed to slow down considerably.

It's indeed very rare any person from Cult Mechanicus use "fuck" in a sentence, making me smile and laugh, slightly agitating her.



A: Well, because I . . . kinda worked with them few times. Cooperation would be aaaaaaaaaaaaa . . . stretch.

A: No, we didn't. At Armageddon . . . well . . . Situation was pressing enough to drop any official thing. I just . . . did what had to be done.

A: If your own ordo doesn't grant you access, then think what it really implies.

A: May the fact, that I was let go each time without persecution be a testament to my purity. Their training is also where I learnt to fight demons and how to cleanse places out of their existence. It was Grey Knights who helped me to polish my powers to such extent.

A: Yes, all of knights knew, or no, not knew, or . . . not just knew, they . . . felt what lied . . . what . . . was part of me. Or what I was part of. It is very hard to draw line between us now. Much easier back then.

A: I don't know. Grandmaster Vesuvius never behaved like he knew. Whether they choose not to show it or didn't know, I cannot tell, but had to had damn good reason to help me. Otherwise I would end up as molecules in the air or prisoner in tesseract.

A: Mare Nox, sector Aqua Vitae in Ultramar Expansion, 258.M32. Freshly after Demon incursion. We remained on planet for weeks after, so they could take time teaching me how to control this power.

A: It's kinda long story, for another time.

The amount of bombs I dropped made her sit for a while, doing nothing. Except for sporadic head swipe there was no movement whatsoever.

I sat back, anticipating next question. Frederick stood in front of windows across whole chamber, with back turned to us. His words impossible to make out at such distance in midsts of vox chants. Then, all of a sudden she got up, reactivated servo and lit fire on its crown with a spark lightning spewing out of finger, took every parchment from my board and burned each one, shredding them into tiny pieces before tossing into fire. Frederick turned to us, taking his attention off comm relay. His face indicated he didn't know what to think of all this. Neither did I. Flame on the skull grew in heat intensity, from orange flame to purple blaze.

After all pieces were destroyed to ash, last message on her device ordered me to resolve planetary conflict all at once no matter the consequences and casualties, resume food production as top priority and relocate all available resources to aid Lokinyth Forgeworld, disregarding Orks and cultists. I myself was to ask sisters for bodyguard protection and head assault on whatever remained of Blacklight secessionists. Since I had written allocation of military oversight over of Order Of Laurel Crown, I was to order them to relocate their strength to my armies in every capacity and secure resources, not even waiting for their decisions. Neither for Janna's compliance, but directly enforce edict.

At very end she warned me to keep her identity secret towards anyone, even other acolytes. She approached Frederick and showed him something, he saluted and vowed on his life to keep secret. She walked out in haste.

On one side I was relieved. On the other . . . I dreaded to think what caused



my other self come out of shadows. His humming growl filled world around me, cutting off any other sounds for a moment. He retreated in fading, mocking hiss, leaving me with a riddle.

I cannot see strings of fate like he does. He sees eternity from ten thousand layers, gazing over swats of dimensions, cosmic energies and rivers of life flowing through universe. And despite all my attempts to evade mass casualties, he was still smiling at me. I felt how he became more and more happy. His feast awaited. In shape and manner I could not yet imagine.

Sometimes I wish we could just cooperate, but I doubt it'd be of any use. In all this mess, there was only one sure outcome . . . Soon, I would fulfill purpose of my existence once again . . .

When we finished interrogation, It was already 14 hour local. Still, there was no sleep as long as Frederick loomed over my head. I asked if this interview healed his doubts. He admitted there was no better way to put him at ease. If inquisitor decided I could keep my post, he wouldn't dispute holy servant of the Emperor. Barely keeping awake, sitting in that chair, I asked if he knew anything about her beforehand. That was negative. In turn, he asked for how long did I know. This time I had to refuse. It was obvious she kept both of us under direct oath of secrecy.

I relayed all orders she commanded me to do. Commissar wasn't surprised and understood her intention. According to him, it was about damn time I made use of authority at my disposal. And it filled me with relief. He was that kind of person who wouldn't drop his conduct or slip his tongue. So I asked if he still saw me as worthy of support and he said . . . that if I wasn't, he wouldn't let me pass to palace in the first place. This remark became breeze of fresh air in midst of all politicking around me. Perhaps this was the greatest extent of praise I could ever receive from world at all.

Anyway, with all previously said, Frederick eagerly jumped on notion of setting up this meeting. I also asked him to make preparations for all out attack on Starport Gamma. My attempt to excuse myself to sleep met fierce resistance. He wouldn't let me sleep until I made direct call and order to monastery, reminding me of how urgent and important is following instructions of inquisitor. He almost had to drag me to office by arm.

Our staff was more considerate than workers of similar establishments under thumb of other people. Emmy, sweet Emperor bless her soul, would be waiting with dinner for me in the office. Even Maroo came by to see if how was I doing. Frederick had to put sentry to ensure nobody interrupted our work.

He stood over me, correcting mistakes in orders I wrote. For moment it felt, once again, like writing lessons as five year old. With certain reluctance on my part, we ironed out dozens of scripts to make sure every word counted. Two hours later he let me write it properly on a scroll. Making use of sister's presence in palace, he sent for delegation. We waited until sister Martha, Emperor bless her sweet curves, came with delegation.

I explained my need for high ranking officer to deliver this executive order to officer acting on behalf of Canoness Superior at monastery. She voiced her displeasure in wry wince to carry anything for me, but I reminded her that for time being order was legally obliged to follow my orders. She definitively didn't like me bossing her around but complied, assuring it will be delivered to Lydia this



evening. Her inept attitude to cooperation filled my vision of future with unease. I behaved as diligently as I could, not wanting any scene to happen this early after audit

Only when my duties were done did Commissar let me off the hook. I could finally eat my cold dinner and sap cold tea, but after Martha's visit, I felt like going to sleep.

Returning to empty room felt . . . hollow and alone. I sat in that chair in silence, thinking about how screwed up is the situation. It's like . . . there was nothing I could do to remedy anything anymore. This rebound of self defeatism wormed its way into my heart. Suddenly I was all awake again, overthinking everything. Dead silence in room intensified as first drops of rain hit window. Evening approached. By 20 hours it already became dark with storm raging over plains. Even though my body still had strength, my mind floated away. I didn't even get up to answer call on my PDA. Few minutes after, Frederick knocked on the door. He spared me harangue, seeing my condition.

Battle plan for tomorrow was decided. We also had appointment with Kitlana onboard Sororitas' Dauntless class light cruiser, Blue Rosary. They would help, but there was a catch. Namely the great pleasure and displeasure of canoness Lydia, who was pleased to finally be contacted in this case. Kitlana would become my personal health care provider. Imagine my unshock . . . The bad news were of course how they despised manner in which I ordered "cooperation" effort. It seemed my very thought out letter didn't impress Lydia. Palatine Martha would remain as operational bodyguard of sister dialogus within palace, providing direct communication link between organizations.

As for my SQI squad . . . Lydia assigned canoness Patricia and her purifier squads as my bodyguards. I hoped someone new would break the discharm. Frederick never heard of that name either. They would arrive later, as her troops were in process of cleansing Rotuna system.

Everything seemed to be prepared on very tight schedule. On that notice, commissar urged me to get rested before tomorrow's operation.



— Arrival Day [125] — Pursuit day [III] — Day of reign [79_] —

Fortunately, very long local day/night cycle allowed me to have proper rest. When Emmy knocked at 8, I was already up. Due to early departure, Frederick ordered collective meal in ball room for all officers involved. There were even few sisters and priestess Tela. Despite schedule, we had to go through mandatory gratitude'ish psalm to the Emperor and round of purity chants. Fifteen minutes of bollocks was the only way she could still exert any power over my office.

After we finished eating, Maroo informed me about scroll brought in the night by Administratum courier, addressed directly to the governor, sealed with wax icon of Sororitas Order. They performed all scans and deemed it safe to open but seal is a seal. Frederick told us we had 5 minutes left before departure so it wouldn't be possible for me to make it. Instead, he called over one of soldiers and ordered him to bring it from office while we headed to landing zone.

Courier brought me a scroll and a letter. Both of my commanders became perplexed to see a letter. James swore he didn't see it as he put scroll on my desk during night watch. I put both in backpack. In meantime, Mastaf, Ojik and Kimbly readied troops to depart via subway train to port.

Our craft had problem with cold engines which delayed us by five minutes . . . Commissar didn't like one second of it. Had he not traveled with me, I imagine there would be exemplary execution sweeping at aeronautica division.

In the end, we decided to take Albatross. It wasn't fighting machine but it had its own little, ionized shield protecting from cosmic radiation. Maybe not as durable Valkyrie but at least comfortable. I could watch during our ascension, how dozens of transports landed and departed from spires at port. There was even one full freighter docked in shipyard, undergoing repair. Tall smokestack chimneys of manufacturing plants under mountain ridges covered its slopes in white mist. Tankers and container ships moving back and forth through Rivus canal. Life was returning to this little patch of land. Buzz of AVs remained visible even from low orbit.

Our flight lasted 17 minutes. We have been attached to Old Valor once again. Hirito waited for us with whole committee, this time in addition of Reinhart and his four officers. I sensed lightning strikes shot from each of their eyes. Both of their promotions hinged on this operation and both remained unmoved competitors.

We were taken to our quarters for time being, until Huges called in. He was at Blue Rosary, setting up meeting with Lydia.

Despite adversary interest of Hirito and Reinhart, we could talk in professional atmosphere, going over our predicaments and estimations. Once we sidelined subject to tactics . . . well . . . both of them started passive aggressive boasting with their maneuvers with which they defeated tough enemies before. Fortunately, I could excuse myself due to correspondence awaiting my attention.

My room was visibly made to house honorable guests. Golden décor, marble and cherub reliefs on the ceiling and big, armored window I could look upon planet or starport.

After making sure I wasn't spied on, both in physical and astral, I sat at



desk and finally took closer look at both items. Envelope was made old parchment, almost as thick as cardboard. Stiff and reliant, built more like box than envelope, with its own cubical walls and folded opening. On its back written, "to the governor Ariel of planet Mara, in utmost emergency". Seal in front depicted Imperial Aquila within circle.

Scroll, locked in ornamented metallic tube, signified with purity seal at its side. Opening surface on shaft sealed with Sororitas wax emblem over paper, addressed from Lydia to me, in addition to long purity seal about our duty to the Emperor. I always liked breaking those seals. It has something . . . magical to it.

Scroll itself wasn't anything exciting. Just a scroll. It contained loooooooooong enumeration of all forces brought under my command, list of surrogate battalions, passage about terms of lease and my own duties to the order as its temporary overseer. In addition, it had small piece of flimsy paper at its very edge on the end, attached with . . . piece of duct tape. Yes, a small piece of paper duct tape. Despite being so . . . out of place attachment it held, I guess, contained the most important few sentences.

Words written by hand, scribbled in inartistic and quick way. Lydia was warning me about traitors in the order. First, Janna has not judged Synthia and now both of them were dead. Reports stated suicide for Synthia and glorious death against overwhelming odds for Janna. She specifically asked to keep it for myself, as only four people know about truth for now, and I was fifth. This was a shocker, hard to believe.

At this point, I couldn't believe how far this corruption has gone. Synthia was partially responsible for its spread but she wasn't exactly the corrupting type. A good actor, for sure, but not director. None of it made sense to me. Every move of our enemies seemed to be chopped and without accurate goal in mind. At least that what appeared to transpire at this time.

Not knowing what to do with this information yet, I rolled it back, made sure to burn the note and brew a tea. Thoughts run all over the place. For few minutes there was no stopping or bringing them to stillness. My greatest concern remained death of Janna. If someone got to her through celestians, without raising alarm, our enemies loomed closer then I could previously imagine. Whole hour passed on my "what ifting"

Once this matter found peace I reached for envelope. Didn't look like much. After that little note, there was nothing more which could surprise me.

Pff . . . and boy, oh boy . . . was I wrong . . .

As soon as pulled out letter, small circuit board with short tape cable dropped on desk. My hair curl on head. Gosebumps covered skin. . . I instantly knew what this meant without even looking at damn scribbling. In great haste and even greater disbelief I read it through, multiple times.

In few sentences of polite welcoming my cooperation, Edmund delineated how happy he was to be blessed with capable helping hand. How happy he was to finally meet person he could give Betty to. He wrote that . . . he knew I would treat her well and with respect she deserved, that . . . I would be capable of taming her needy temperament. Apparently she was already aware of how I embarked on great journey over the stars to prove her my dedication to her heart. She liked it a lot, awaiting her prince. So much, even Ada became slightly jealous of me.



But to complete hero's journey, I would be in need of knowledge . . . only he could provide. Something giving me upper hand over everyone else. Something worth vial of my royal blood . . . As you can assume, the only one drawing my blood was Kitlana. It really made me question what reality I lived in.

There was second parchment with instructions of how I should use data stored at micro slate and step by step procedure how to upload it to my PDA.

I had no idea whether to use it or burn it. Rage boiled inside me, thinking how shortsighted was my judgment when it came to extent of his scheming. I could not tell anymore who or what we were fighting anymore. For moment anger overcame me so much it bordered on helplessness. During those few moments I felt filled with blind, murder rage. If there was anyone around, I would strangle them with bare hands. He played me like pawn, but it was not the issue. I felt how my other self . . . snarled at me, anticipating offering.

Whatever I did to avert genocide would only end up as greater calamity later, all seemingly according to Reitziger's plan. Wherever we uncovered chaos cult and burned it, it was still according to his plan. Every little victory we achieved . . . all according to his plan. From my point of view, it looked like he always knew everything, yet at the same time, there was no place for him to escape. I had no idea what were his ties to Drukhari, but SoS would never help him anymore. Whatever remained from Crimson Raiders was just a name. I . . . I . . . I didn't actually know how to feel about him. Very strongly despised, but at the same time respected in equal amount. We became allies of inconvenience, but at the same time waged war upon each other. A theater through and through, which I could not make sense of.

Half an hour of thinking later still wouldn't bring me closer to decide whether use device or burn it, presuming it all went according to his plan after all. At the same moment, morbid curiosity and hellish resentment mixed in me. Ultimately . . . desire to know won me over.

With instructions it was easy to take off back plate of communicator, fumble with sockets and initiate data download. Making sure it downloaded data, I hid it to my backpack without disposing of evidence. It would be nice if any clues of his whereabouts could be discovered. Waiting for data clusters to defragment felt like guilt. Like . . . murder. Like . . . letting down portion of my own soul. Betraying my own self.

I opened up new partition displayed in new data entry. EVERYTHING was neatly organized and categorized. Even holo UI received changes to accommodate new type of database. There was a lot of options . . . I could browse by categories, places, dates, fleets, resources, species, heh . . . This was all about sector. Like I suddenly played opened cards with galaxy. This database had even our own forces in it. Fleet arrangement, destination, patrol routes, freight transit. Not as detailed as my personal access, but enough to be suspicious. After all, they had access to anything they wanted under Amschel's reign.

And I even found his name. On distant planet Shogo, as guest of Lord Ytvik, planetary governor, mining magnate of planetary guild and member of SoS for many years. As interesting it was, I focused of Starport Gamma. To make sure our assault didn't result in too many casualties our fleet composition had to be exact counter of their ships. According to this manifest there were no ships stationed at the moment. In fact, there were no warships in nearby system at all. Last entry,



corresponding to 14 days prior, seen mass exodus of Bl's forces to Nerolinia system. All ships from whole sector have been called in and there were a lot of them. If what I saw was true, guerrilla warfare was implemented to slow down any production and give time to regroup at Shogo.

Few entries containing Shchootex spoke only about new admission of additional ships. Few messages depicted him as not trustworthy and was supposed to be discarded upon delivery of new freighter fleet. Captain of Calim Crow lunar cruiser, don't remember his name now, was supposed to destroy his forces afterwards. When I looked him up, entry of his fleet consisted of four cruisers and three light cruisers alone. If this data was to be trusted, I counted 2 Overlord battle cruisers, 14 Lunar, 4 Gothic, 4 Dictator cruisers, 9 dauntless and 4 endeavor light cruisers with 9 sword frigates. Quite a firepower for a private owner. Not to mention 276 freighters. As I perused newly found infotek, ring to door shot my stomach up, making me shove everything to drawer before responding to terminal. 1st officer, in company of two her men, came to escort me to dining hall. In exact moment vox system announced departure out of port.

Captain's dining lounge bustled with chatter. Only twenty people concentrated in four groups, but very lively folk. Caroline sat me together with commodores and commissars. Captain welcomed me again with great honors. After usual question of how did I like my quarters, etc, Huges started to explain how our meeting would proceed onboard Blue Rosary. During desert, due to lack of suitable subject, asked if I had explored contents of my correspondence. I told them that scroll from Lydia contained legal documentation about our terms of cooperation, signed by canoness Janna herself. And as for letter . . . in hope he would not dig further I said it was from Sister Hospitaler Kitlana - results of her examination. It only intrigued him further, how sister found my soul integrity after all this marvelous display of power. I told him few things to satisfy his curiosity, but he relentlessly battered me with more and more specific questions, like he suspected something. For second, my gaze met Frederick's. He looked at me suspicious as well. I couldn't help but blow a wide banana smile due to how stupidly convoluted this all has become. Enough to make me lie to my commissars. Percival thought it was because he asked me if I like sisters in "unofficial way", erupting laughter among them. Come to think about it, I probably looked to both of them like adolescent kid . . . making my ways around sisters.

When we finished, Huges looked at his watch, declaring we had 30 minutes before departure, so I should get ready to depart.

I had little to no interest meeting anyone anymore. Sitting again in my room, in front of window, I seriously weighted my options, knowing my continuous presence would only bring something very, very bad to whole world. Running away, abandoning office would put subsector in substantial peril, yet I was afraid it would still be less damaging than feeding . . . him. Knowing, all my life he hasn't been wrong even one time . . . there were serious doubts if I even have a choice in this matter. Maybe running away would trigger this calamity. Maybe further involvement would trigger this calamity. Maybe doing nothing would trigger this calamity.

His insatiable hunger cannot be sated with few thousand souls. Even of Eldar descent. Whatever would come . . . would strip life from millions. Its souls torn into oblivion, withering away into nothingness, consumed by eternal hunger . . . I doubt anyone but Father truly understood extent of madness He created,



birthing me into existence. Worst of all, I know that whatever would trigger this catastrophe . . . I am always in need of his power to stop it . . . No strength or army was sufficient enough to help it.

Lines
24108-24116

Lost due to recording data corruption

Both vessels came so close we could toss balls from window to window. Our shuttle arrived in their hangar little after 17 hours standard time. Lydia and her celestians waited for us. This time it was only me, two commodores, two commissars and REBIIS.

Rosary operated in usual manner. Almost all staff we saw has been comprised of women only. It explained few technical staff, but we met with Magos Domina KIT-REL, who had more than enough techpriestesses to keep ship running. REBIIS managed to strike conversation with her in the command center. There was no sign of Kitlana though. I have seen inquisitorial ships before, but not even one was managed and manned exclusively by Adepta Sororitas. 14 000 voidsmen have actually been acolyte sisters in training. From what I heard, even Basket of Thorns was mostly managed and manned by imperial navy despite being under sororitas command.

Blue Rosary was something else. Its spine corridor had been decorated in all manners possible. From flowery pots, giant garlands, sculptures, even planters, massive sculptures of their great heroines, adorned with gold insignia put over their necks, paintings and large scrolls containing hymns of Emperor. There was also that smell. Like in flower shop, filled with rosy water taste in the air among rows of thousands of candle stands. We even met team of sisters responsible solely over upkeep of their flames.

Lydia shared a glimpse of their conduct and recruitment process on our way to briefing room, how only most devout to Emperor could ever hope of becoming a true warmaiden. But from what I have witnessed, it was pretty obvious that looks were big part of their daily routine. She confirmed with deal of pride, that no daughter of the emperor could ever hope to call herself so without properly representing his glory. She asked me however, to hold onto my judgment for two days until canoness Patricia would take place by my side, with wide smile. Sister Greta laughed out loud along rest of her squad. Canoness presented them with earful about their behavior, but it didn't wipe their smiles.

We were led to war room. Sister Captain Francheska waited in company of few other women. Unlike all other sisters I saw to this point, she clearly had more liberal approach to augmentations. Temple oculus, enhanced vox box, neural links in her spine, bionic left hand, reinforced jaw and partially infused armor plating. I could tell she wasn't sister of the order despite wearing white bob hair, yet everyone called her "sister". Before we could start, mandatory few prayers to our lord and savior Holy God Emperor were mandatory.

Briefing wasn't long. Information exchange has already been established few days prior and coordination efforts already on their way. Francheska talked about my "irresponsible" plan of assaulting starfort on my own. While Lydia went



step after step of our approach, Reinhart made small changes and adjustments to timing, burning, angle of attack, manpower management and weapon utilization. For once, sisters were interested in talking over all points in the plan.

This whole time . . . I doubted whether to tell them or not about this new information. There was no guarantee it had credibility, much less accuracy. I would just listen to what officers talked about while holding to my confidence in single handling whole boarding operation rather than admitting anything.

Commodore setup this plan with me as their main power projection. Time allocated for boarding operation dropped drastically with each direct hit they sustained. Francheska pulled blueprint of Starport Gamma and designated crucial points we had to control to overtake internal defense system, allowing mass deployment of troops. Unfortunately for me, from four objective points, one, the internal cogitator mainframe, was located six miles away from second nearest. They didn't doubt I could get there, but time was of the essence. Avenger could exchange fire with station, but rest of our fleet remained easy pickings. Two or three hits of their plasma macro batteries would sink light cruisers. I stopped listening half way. My consciousness fell in depths of thoughts, deciding to share or not information from Reitziger.

I came back to total silence. Everybody looked at me, awaiting response. Frederick eyed me suspiciously, asking if I was alright. I responded it was just deep thinking how to approach things when inside and asked for a break. Greta offered us a short rest in next room but . . . I needed to talk to our shining star, though mental blockade stopped me from taking a step. She left through door in opposite direction. As one of sisters tried to assist me, I excused myself trying to piece together where, by scraps of conversations. In the end, commissars approached me. Huges asked if I truly was alright, because my focus constantly drifted away. There was no way I explained everything to him in front of everyone else, no matter what. He had to satisfy himself with excuse of unfinished business from audit. After duping them with pathetic excuse, I approached Greta, asking to take me to commander.

Three celestines escorted me in silence out of war room to main walkway till very end, to Lydia's office. She knocked on the door, announcing my arrival. Canoness used terminal to let me in, having sisters wait outside.

Office connected to bedroom, lighted with dose of rosy tint on vault fixtures. Stacks of paper books neatly laid in wooden library shelves behind transparent windows. Antique contraptions from explorer era, perhaps even double my age, frozen in stasis displays. I recognized hacking terminal used to override door controls of pre imperium ships. I saw it in one of archeotech catalogs Dad gave me. Everything furnished with bright wood furniture with red cushions. Visibly aged.

She sat arms crossed on her throne chair, left heel on right knee and cup of whatever substance beside old psalm book on desk. Two angel figurines carved in wood on front panels.

Door closed behind me and sealed lock. Holo interface vanished.

She waited until I came further to ask me purpose of this visit, in very unusual way. I allowed myself to sit in one of two chairs in front her, while she patiently waited for response. My words started with appreciation of her time, but she didn't like it. Without elaborate grammar, Lydia quickly cut to the chase,



sharing with me her distressful observation, that I was hiding something. Reminding her of note, brought forward vehement, albeit smothered demand to shut up, making her lean on the table and dropping any pretense.

I leaned forward on desk as well, trying to look serious and asking what happened to Kitlana. She herself wrote about assigning her to my direct oversight squad.

According to her knowledge, hospitaler left palace after my examination to test gathered samples. Everyone reported sister techpriestes was in a hurry, like she discovered something very bad and in dire need of proper consultation with Mechanicus convent. With dose of hostility, she demanded to know what games did I play.

For my taste we didn't have time to discuss all of it, yet canoness deemed it different. She pulled bolt pistol from under the table, quickly lift off chair and aimed at me, which instinctively got me up, tossing chair on its side. She walked over desk, trying to surround me all by herself, cutting my escape route to door. . . . Like it would ever work. Instead of mortal danger, I sensed irritation in her aura.

Never the less, Lydia wouldn't listen to "no". I wondered why it is so important, but she wasn't having me question her. Even though her arm was stretched to me in anger, I saw her eyes paint desperation. She wanted answers as much as me, not holding back to reach bottom of this mystery.

We locked gazes for moment . . . Time made me forget just how pretty she was . . . My irritation fades as soon as I probed her aura with my astral sight. It was . . . uffff . . . blocked. Something made her cut off from other souls. I felt anxiety in her. That feeling of loosing grip and control over situation. In her own head, it was very awkward to aim at me, but she felt there was no alternative. A last measure, never intending to pull trigger anyway.

I let her know that accounts she was about to hear came from others, due to my indisposition at a time, reading mind of prisoner. And of course, omitting part about my other self.

The more she learnt what happened, the more she lowered pistol in disbelief. Her mind acknowledged drastic needs undertaken to pull information out of de Estana, but she couldn't believe nobody informed anyone about actual demon attack on real world, especially present Kitlana. Canoness followed with many surplus inquires about what happened during my examination, renewing her grip and grit. In followup questions, she finally asked why I remained silent about Kitlana, getting really angry, almost screaming. Her jaw dropped to hear techpriestess was actually an inquisitor, taking her by wide margin of surprise. In one moment, her posture relaxed and dropped. But her mind wasn't misaligned . . . more like perplexed. I said she showed me rosette twice, but Lydia calmly and diligently denied my words, sweeping office with series of glances, like searching for answer.

According to her, hospitaler couldn't be even become Sororitas acolyte. When I shared how she provided me certificate of Magos Genetor, she smirked and laughed at me in what looked like poor attempt at coping. She lowered gun explaining that she was still in training after years of servitude. Never have been fully ingrained by Cult Mechanicus either. Certainly never performed any clandestine work and never had her own, private laboratory. Asked me if I ever



saw name engraved on rosette, which blew me out of water. It never dawned on me to actually check it, because who in their right mind doubted legitimacy of an inquisitor. We both learned something valuable at that moment.

Lydia said I should get back to war room and walked towards bedroom, but I stopped her by saying it was not yet everything. She was almost furious to know there is more.

Things we were about to discuss would change her whole perception of world. After informing bridge of the delay, I pulled chair up and sat myself comfortably, turning it towards open room, while she stood there, impatiently waiting.

I begun by explain what stacks of documents that were uncovered about Society of Sovereign, Blacklight, Crimson Raiders, internal struggle of Mechanicus, flop with de Estana family and what we saw at Ministorum, ending with Kitlana's interrogation. Even presented all telemetry data obtained, presenting orders she gave me in capacity of inquisitor, but covered Reitziger's involvement for my own sake.

Lydia grabbed my PDA and hastily begun to scroll through pages of entries, whispering out disappointed "you are all heretics". In the end, she sat on sofa under window, turning away from me. Her face reflected in window like blank piece of parchment. Her spirit waned. Despite putting up facade in physical space, sorrow, disappointment and betrayal engulfed her auric field. It passed in minute. Upon further examination, she called Greta to order her to stop meeting and redirect assault. Even after minutes of silence, it seemed her mind still drifted somewhere else, until I called her name. She instantly rebounded, giving me device back and asking to prepare for drop pod planetfall. In her opinion, if this information was true, our target lied elsewhere. She asked me to lend strength in frontal assault and establishing a drop zone.

As much as nobody in governor's position wants to be bossed around, it seemed as Lydia had a good reason to pitch me together with rest of sisters. Greta instantly acknowledged her assignment of helping me prepare for drop. Without delay, celestians walked me towards armory, giving me time to secure PDA. Since nobody understood what was on my device, I could secure clusters nobody was supposed to witness, like Edmund's instructions. Fortunately, nobody asked any questions or exerted attention towards me, allowing me to focus on locking up those entries in peace. Except for yellow alarm ringing on ship.

Preparation bay for orbital drop has become bustling with hundreds of people. Frederick called me to check what was going on. I did not have much to explain about sudden change in plans, directing his inquiry to canoness. Before we finished talking, shot from macrocannon battery reverberated through hull. Not even Greta had any idea what was going on, but this would not slow down their preparations. Dozens of battle sisters entered equipment chambers to outfit themselves in armor. Hundreds sisters had to help in their dress up. Each room conducted by techpriestess. First time in my life had I seen how Sororitas prepared for orbital strike. Not only was it fascinating to listen to chants of choirs but somewhat . . . uplifting to glance upon sisters' black jumpsuits. Ehhhhhhhhh . . . almost a loss you don't get to see it everyday.

I was given what looked like sororitas plate and helmet, hastily adjusted for male figure. Untie my hair, color it white and I could pass for a warmaiden.



Unfortunately they didn't have much else and It certainly wasn't my first pick, preferring to go down in my regular clothes. Armor plate is not my protection method anyway.

Unlike Space Marines, sisters did not put much reverence into gearing up, but mistress superior made sure to invoke their fighting spirit by conducting battle songs through choirs, putting effort in sanctifying minds, souls and guns. Ardent followers of holy trinity - melta, flamer and bolter, readied themselves in full in matter of 40 minutes. In meantime, deck overseer palatine Mikaela, explained to me how Lydia decided to assault Reina Citadel near hydroponic plant as surprise tactic. Shot we heard was a preemptive bombarding attempt. Orders were to land inside defending walls and establish a perimeter, allowing for further reinforcements by teleportation. While she explained, I brought Frederick on the line to avoid misdirected orders. He sent us orbital footage of citadel, and live feed of impact, covered in clouds of dust.

Almost like planned, first shots from anti-orbital cannons hit our shields. Captain announced red alarm and Defcon1 to all personnel. Sisters readied themselves into drop pods. 4 rhinos, 2 Immolators and 2 Exorcists entered deployment bay to be readied in front of teleportarium. We heard hangar bay opening behind walls. I asked what was that sound. Four Valkyrie transports in black and silver rolled out of holding rooms. Whichever maiden wouldn't fit in drop pod, directed themselves to hallway and further to transports in hangar bay.

Before anyone boarded anything, we had to make sure at least one squad was equipped with homing device. As last effort, I managed to persuade Greta to send my drop pod first, because my powers prevented any kind of loss during transition. With my precise position, they could recalibrate drop coordinates. This didn't come pass, as captain ordered immediate drop sequence. Mikaela and her seraphim squad filled empty seats.

There was no time to loose, so we buckled up. Vox announced immediate drop, while holoovid displayed our orbit, projection, estimated coordinates, all telemetry as well as ETA impact time. We felt pod transported into floor and its hatch closed behind us. Servo mechanism brought us to deployment position. Few seconds of countdown followed immediate increase in velocity. Despite going through hundreds of drop pod deployments, adrenaline still thickened through my body. Our flight remained stable. From four lance shots, only one hit the mark, but its meager strength was easy to deflect.

30 seconds later grav chutes deployed with their characteristic, high pitch sound. Harnesses opened and Palatine shouted her prepared orders through sound of mass shooting. I deployed shield around pod and we opened doors, flooding surroundings with bolter fire. This was nothing compared to torrent of artillery pieces showering our position. I gauged durability of shield and instructed sisters to stay within semi visible bubble when running towards cover. Mikaela waited for my signal with finger already on trigger.

I pushed cloud of dust away so sisters had better chance at aiming. Since I did not have my gauntlets, my defense could last only minutes at a time if I didn't want to damage myself. It was enough for us to make way towards bunker in front. Sisters used Melta charge to blow a hole in its gate, letting hell loose inside. There was no mercy. Soldier, worker or servitor, all mowed down without question. During this time, I informed Greta of very bad drop position, sending them visual feed. We were supposed to assault hydroponics farm, not citadel



itself.

Giant dust cloud in distance loomed eerily over food plants. Macro cannon devastated a whole damn mountain. Then, another shot hit something behind horizon, with power so great I felt vibrations of rockcrete structure.

While sisters tried to break through horde of defenders, Greta, looking at my live feed from helmet camera, decided that it was perfect and gave signal to drop. We were inside outer walls, positioned 2 kilometers directly north to command bunker. She advised me to start by taking down orbital cannon just half kilometer east. I could tell how close, just by roaring sound of its shots. Francheska granted me access to ships telemetry, useful to measure how much more time before void shields deplete.

Before I gave her green light for sending pods, we needed to make sure landing zone was relatively safe. Although Greta tried to follow orders of Lydia, to send out all available drop pods on ground, she couldn't refuse my direct order to stop. Captain acknowledged risk and followed my instructions. For time being, forces already deployed have been transferred under my command.

I gathered Seraphims and performed a sweep around upper landing zone. It was a big airstrip built on upper level of citadel. Enough to serve as staging area for marauder bombers if they had any. Top shelf has been built as bombardment proof. Unfortunately, it meant there was a lot of gunners and defenses around. We fought through corridors to secure at least east side of landing zone for some kind of drop point, but in middle of all this fighting we were surrounded from all sides. We had to constantly move on. Drop pod run out of ammunition just in time before lascannons melted it. First sister was killed by autocannon fire. Second by lucky lasgun shot just under shoulder pad. They did not relent, but our ammunition was running dry. Melta charges almost depleted. Only few magazines of bolt pistols left. Immolators with depleted flamer decided picked up las rifle from fallen soldier and abundant amount of battery packs.

My limited capabilities allowed me to operate shield and throw smaller things, like supply crates or carts as heavy ordnance, without strain. Occasional ripping off catwalks from wall or straight throwing people out of windows. Fortunately, idiots still tried to haul large amount of grenades at us, making it even more fun. Sisters as usual, in bloody fervor of war, did not think before charging at full squads of guardsmen, depreciating our count to just 7 people. Mikaela was equipped with Iron rosary, so refractor field protected her, but rest of Seraphims didn't take their mortality into account. And it infuriated me how they didn't listen, because none would die if we only did it methodically step by step and most of all, without blind charging. Just like that, 11 sisters died for nothing, believing Emperor guided them into war.

Greta was loosing her patience, screaming through vox if they finally could send reinforcements. For them, 20 minutes seemed like hours. For us, it felt like few seconds. Since we had most of their forces focused on us, I gave her a green light to drop some of pods.

In moment I focused on drop zone, two more sisters were downed by heavy bolter fire in corridor. Mika gathered surviving girls around, halting advance, but just at a time we had to move on if we didn't want to be surrounded from every corridor. I paved path forward, taking autocannon and heavy bolter tarantulas head on, through whole length of supply corridor. Seraphim used all remaining



grenades to deal with them. For moment, there even was silence as mercenaries scattered.

Not for long, as another alarm started to roar few second later, just in time for arrival of our reinforcements. One of pods hit edge of runaway, toppling down at tremendous speed. Mika wanted to help them immediately. Another pod landed somewhere in control complex, caving in roof and possibly quite a few floors. Last one crashed in center of air strip, immediately becoming fire magnet.

We run downstairs next to resupplying lift in order to help rest of squads pinned by heavy fire. On lower segments, main corridors had already been reinforced with heavy weapons nests, cutting us off from drop point. With bit of sneaky approach Mika and 3 other girls infiltrated from left flank while rest of us drew fire. As much as I tried to convince mercenaries to surrender, as much they returned it with bullets. Fortunately, this time we didn't loose anyone.

Supply rail hallway led somewhere in right direction. Chatter in our comms intensified as team Lily-2 called for help, being pinned by heavy fire in ammunition storehouse. Before we could help them, we had to help ourselves. Our advance was held back by large detachment of small caliber weaponry. This time with commander knowing something about tactical approach, using feint retreat, luring us in and divide. As soon as we got close they run away, giving others opportunity to attack. It was at least somewhat effective. They traded 20 men for 1 sister more. Girls really didn't understand concept of staying inside my shield.

In the end, it was all just delaying tactics. As soon as all mercs scattered, vault above us closed down in symphony of demo charge explosions. From amount of rubble I had to hold, I'd say at least few floors above. In moment of disorientation, sisters asked for my orders but I was focused on holding all this mass above. When I finished scattering rubble, we could see sunlight through dust again. Unfortunately it was too much, damaging my astral body and in consequence, physical. Bursting blood vessels begun to color my hands with red patches. Some places marked with burns. Through radio, we heard Lily-2 reporting situation after collapse as in near vicinity, giving us clues where to search.

Yet another time, I reminded sisters that this is what happens if they just rush mindlessly without securing their immediate area. From that moment, they were much more careful. Sororitas jumped over rubble to recon our surroundings. While sister Camile coordinated with Lily-3 and 4 attempt of rescuing Lily-2, Mika searched for suitable way through rubble for me. I needed to take a rest before going anywhere.

Greta informed me that two drop pods didn't make it to surface. I had 8 squads in my immediate control, while 4 scattered around whole citadel. In moment of rush, I ordered her to advise sisters not to rush out mindlessly in surge of battle frenzy, explaining what happened to my seraphim squad. It hit a nerve in her, but she understood my concerns. I also needed to directly contact Lydia. For time being it was impossible as she led Valkyrie strike over citadel, arriving in ETA 15 minutes at our current positions.

I also called Frederick, who couldn't believe in my PDA's capabilities. With few sentences he was brought up to speed about sudden decision to redirect attack, which made him spit succinctly vulgarisms into void. From what I heard, he called over some guy, ordering to raise ship wide alarm, then came back, saying



they will ready their troops for planetfall as soon as possible. I had to cut off as we neared storehouse.

One of walls had been toppled down outside, falling down with chunks of upper floors. I must say it impressed my own self how much weight I was able to lift without any help.

What remained of supply rail corridor ended against giant, metal gate. Half rounded chunk of solid steel. Not something I wanted to lift right now. Camille coordinated with sister superior to move towards what looked like our position. Mikaela took remaining 2 sisters to assault jump over wall, leaving me with only Camille. We could perform assault jump but that wasn't the point. I wanted to get them out of there, not us in. Normally, punching through reinforced rockcrete walls of ammo storage isn't a smart solution, but time was short. After choosing our entry point, we made sure nobody hid behind segment I wanted to bring down. Using bit more strength than necessary, I put my hips into this smash, augmenting it with raw power of all remaining strength. Blasted chunks of wall showered attackers with high velocity and high explosive rubble, resulting in few stray detonations. Mika had to scream into vox through all this chain reaction and ordered immediate rush to newly opened passage. Remaining retributors covered escape.

We consolidated Lily-1and 2 were into one squad. Or what left of them anyway. Sister superior Sarah passed command to Mikaela. Not waiting for more enemies to appear, Sarah hasten us to regroup with the rest. She grew concerns about my state - not being able to move after expending so much psychic strength, but grateful for our timely intervention.

We were pacing towards orbital cannon when Lydia announced over radio for all forces to converge at field command on air strip. Apparently there was no major anti air equipment at airbase . . . go figure, and they could land without heavy casualties. She called me out specifically and asked to conserve strength. Coming back the way we came, there was little resistance left. Whatever scouts patrolled our route, were too scared to engage.

Even though Lydia said there were no complications on their approach I saw only three transports. One of their craft got hit on our eyes, turning into flaming, blazing ball of fire, smashing head on into ground. 2 other craft performed gliding emergency landing, directly smashing into commanding compound on the other side of airstrip. Local defense forces bombarded their own structures to get rid if invaders.

Seeing how they could land "without resistance", our squad rushed through entrenched positions for rescue. We found them securing position in one of storerooms under airfield plate. I contacted Maroo to fill him into situation and hasten reinforcements. Glad to hear me but very disoriented, told me our forces were readying themselves to drop, but they didn't have enough troops to clear out whole damn fortress. He didn't know what to do and why was our plan changed so abruptly. Instead of any explanation, I ordered him to pick up my gauntlets from Old Valor and send it to me right now, alongside few wings of Valkyries. Lydia did the same with Blue Rosary. It wasn't that much, just 7 wings of Valkyries available anyway.

For now, Lydia took charge of fighting and decided we had to move into another, better location. Once our girls managed to secure stable, entrenched



positions, we could finally engage in normal conversation. In moments of relative quietness, I used my database to search for any structural blueprint of Reina Citadel. Up to my pleasant surprise, there was a lot. Names of commanders, officers, their frequencies, some deciphering keys. Even layout of whole citadel. Sisters were mighty impressed to see how well informed “governor's intelligence branch” is. I just played along, saying that our spies were doing a great job. Camille tapped into their communications with help of comm master console in distribution center.

All she could hack into, was choppy chatter between mercenary companies. It appeared as no one knew what was going on and why on Sweet Terra, Sororitas dropped pods right under Starport Gamma, which didn't fire single bullet at our ships. Commanding general Nerod ordered fall back to the command center and preparation of large amount of mobile defenses.

We moved further, stopping in some kind of training facility. Stench of humid sweat filled room. On one side she looked happy to have us in one piece, on the other severely disappointed in her capacity to overcome defenses. Yeah . . . Because rushing without thinking is the best way to win a war. One could expect to be over such petty foolishness after 12 millennia, but no . . . I still can't bear it.

Fortunately, my infotek covered most of citadel's capabilities. She wasn't impressed over our accomplishments, but her eyes lit when I showed her blueprint of whole citadel on holo display. It helped us to plan our approach. Before moving on, I attempted broadcast on local defenses, trying to convince them to surrender. They already seen my display of power, which should serve as validation of my identity. Outright, Nerod declined, depicting me as false governor, usurper of power and mere puppet of industrialists, while their rightful leader Amschel Martens gathered armies which would crush my petty illusion of power. Lydia joined our conversation, daring him to explain his blasphemous conduct against Emperor, by supporting a heretical cult. He gasped air, stammering over words, calling her few names and ordering every “loyal” soldier to show their true dedication to true Imperium. In spur of anger, canoness excommunicated him and cut comms.

Sisters begun preparation to advance on orbital cannon, whilst I called Frederick to explain what happened and our adjustment to situation. He wasn't surprised to hear how we incurred casualties. Information came about transports ready to depart, but I held held them back until Maroo brought him my appurtenances. Using this break, I Made sure to carefully coordinate with him approach of our wings. Once everything was settled, canoness gave out order to march.

Sororitas readied themselves for round two after personell counting. We had only 70 sisters left, but their spirit remained unbroken. We couldn't hope for heavy support due to our current whereabouts. Lydia was aware of how much my powers were centerpiece of this whole assault and acknowledged need to wait for my gear to arrive. This said, she never intended to just sit and wait for another attack. Camille, who seemed as most reasonable sister so far, volunteered to scout ahead enemy forces amalgamating at command center. With words of encouragement from Mika, she returned half hour later to report. According to her, we had at least few hundred mercenaries digging in facilities laying between us and target, but knowing how trickery of heretics could prove deceptive, Lydia increased anticipated threat to few thousands. And added heavy guns into



calculations. She needed few minutes alone to devise a strategy and stepped into one of offices nearby. It was maybe 5, 10 minutes later as she decided to march on in direct confrontation. Instead of quiet infiltration attempt, sisters were singing perdition psalms filling corridors in war choir. Maybe it worked, because most of enemy soldiers decided to retreat. Opposition stiffened when we reached bunker compound. Not as impressive main bunker defense, but still a sturdy one. Our problem were numbers. We might have had firepower and expertise, but there were thousands of mercenaries concentrated there. With rule of a thumb 1 over 5 in fight against humanoid troops for Sororitas, there was severe lack of sisters.

I didn't allow Lydia to launch suicide run. You can imagine she neither tolerated my council, nor my orders in that regard. Ladies stormed orbital cannon positions, leaving me no choice but to follow and support them wit hat least one more gun. Whole assault took additional hour and another 7 sisters. For some reason, that facility operated on skeleton crew, making it easy to take over. Sisters decided not to leave anyone alive, purging whole complex and disabling orbital cannon by cutting off power to firing piece. We went through any available database at hand in command room before receiving communication about approaching reinforcements.

Frederick landed on airstrip half hour later, with fairly low casualties during transition of just 20%. Hiritto sent all available land troops and transports on his ship for help. He really wanted that promotion.

Supporting companies hurried up to catch us. Reconnaissance reported big forces heading our way from all directions. For moment, I really considered to order a retreat, and just like that, another shot from macrocannon decimated surrounding plains. This time shot was close enough to feel its tremors of direct hit. It shook with vibrations all floors.

Few minutes later our reinforcements arrived in numbers, helping to mop up any resistance left, taking total control over canon. Commissar was able to bring 1400 soldiers and few heavy weapon teams to the fray. While sentries secured perimeter, we gathered officers to pass another plan. It was very simple – create distraction with mininal forces, while hidden platoons would circle around, to break through center of back side.

It slowly got complicated as our scouts reported massive movement of troops from surrounding facilities. Team at southern citadel spotted large armored column coming from Regna City, including two Knight Errants. It looked like Blacklight intended to take back citadel at all costs. Too bad it was hollow effort.

Fortress was getting more and more restless. Their radio chatter overcame by defeatism. Frederick saw perfect opportunity as enemy morale was waning and without further planning, we ordered march out. With those gloves, my presence increased our strength by geometric factor.



A: Yes, noctilith subdues psychic power of the warp. But that is only one of its properties.

A: My powers . . . do not come from warp alone. Black stone is crystal. Like funnel, it concentrates. Capable of coherent conduction of energies from higher plains of existence. I have told you already, unlike primarchs, whos astral power is tuned to the warp energies, I am like Father, drawing power from higher planes of existence.

A: Just like it is used in Necron technology to enhance power of their lords.

Our troops remained in high spirits thanks to sisters' unbreakable faith. Lydia, an oriflamme of everything sisters of battle ever hoped to become, loudly and boldly conducted our forces, completely disregarding mine or Frederick's presence.

It took us around 40 minutes to finally reach defending walls of citadel's command center. There probably was a better, underground attack angle but this bloody fervor sisters inspired in our troops served as immense boost to our strength.

I was finally able to put on spectacle. Instead of throwing boulders one at the time, I could just rip whole walls apart. Even one hole was enough to send defenders run scared and scattered. Once they tasted my real powers, all radio communication filled with chaotic amalgamation of orders, screams, curses and prayers. Sisters found inspiration in my strength, considering my presence as gift of the Emperor, raising their voices in mighty chant and storming whatever was behind walls, head on, contempting all perils with extreme prejudice. In their moment of invincibility, this act of faith, most of shots just glazed over sisters without inciting damage. Canoness swung her power sword in rage, against all standing in her way, even dense slabs of ceramite, without ever considering invulnerability of those armors, with 100% results. While sisters concentrated most attention, guardsmen could easily flood defenders with ranged firepower. Soon, it became one sided slaughter.

It only took few minutes until we heard first screams of surrender coming in on open channels. Nerod vehemently demanded they all got back to fighting, but as soon as first line of defense fell, so did other, like domino. Officers claimed that my powers is not something they could fight against, playing right into my hand. I was getting really tired.

Lydia . . . was in her own world at this time. She excommunicated their commander and everyone who didn't immediately abandoned his side became a heretic. I tried talking to her but she would talk me down as well. Her cleansing persecution has begun. It didn't matter if soldiers stood down and begged for mercy. In minds of sororitas, they were heretics already, mercilessly mowed down without a second thought. Fortunately, Frederick had clearer mind and broke off remaining soldiers into squads, sweeping command bunker, encircling remaining lines in combat maneuvers. I left our troops under his command and run off through fire, to find Nerod.

We also received communication from Huges, who managed to prepare some more troops from other vessels and were under preparation to send us



reinforcements, but it was all too late now. Once we entered main compound, their heavy guns didn't matter anymore. Everyone captured by sisters was dead, everyone captured by guardsmen was dead as well. Commissar decided Imperium is in no need of weak and meek mercenaries, incapable of loyalty towards Emperor.

Why didn't I stop them . . . I don't know. Maybe it was brain fart. Maybe I felt it was of no use. Either way, all combatants were eliminated without recourse. Few pockets who tried to fight back managed to postpone their demise, costly selling their lives. In this remaining trance of blood, half of our soldiers died. A severe loss, especially if we could avoid any of that. After we counted all survivors, Lydia remained thorn between magnificent victory and death toll. From initial 106 sisters, only 29 saw end of the battle. I never said "I told you so", but she clearly didn't want to hear from me anything at all when confronted with result.

In the end, I never found Nerod. Commanding bunker had only operators and civilian staff. Fortunately, everyone who feared for their life gathered in there, making it easier to search for any remaining cadre. I forbade hurting any of them, regardless of who they might be. They would just return to active duty under my command. Few minutes later we had command bunker secured.

Not waiting for Olsmo, I grabbed caster on commander's seat and begun to proclaim victory on all channels. Imperium has taken back its Reina Citadel. I also announced that any force who will surrender willingly to our military, would be leanieantly treated, not as traitors or heretics but as captured combatants. It was in good faith, directing broadcast to all people currently locked in fighting on whole planet, to think about their families. To Remind them we were all part of one Imperium. One civilization. Silly infighting would hurt people we cared about the most, at the greatest cost. I called to their sense of duty to the Emperor. In the end, all humanity followed his reign over golden throne. This petty bickering would bring disaster from the wicked heretics, waiting for Imperium to grow weak, to destroy it from the inside . . . and other pompous ideals.

Hearing my proclamation, Mikaela joined me in broadcast with 4 other sisters, backing my speech with chanting psalm of Eternal Light. Some of our soldiers shyly tagged along. In few moments, whole citadel resounded in choir.

As soon as we finished, I turned attention to my health. I knew there was damage just from burning sensations on skin. Commander's chamber was equipped with basic medical supplies. Very basic. After preliminary examination, it didn't look bad. Holding back resulted in minor burns on forearms, not requiring hospitalization.

I moved to balcony overlooking main road to airfield. Most of structures were intact, but there was a visible path of destruction where we fought. If anything, it amazed me that this crazy idea of Lydia's didn't end in disaster. I pulled up display, connecting to data feed from our fleet. Orbital pictures showed extensive damage to surrounding land. Neither fortress or city has been hit by orbital batteries, but part of municipal utilities outside were devastated. Seven giant craters, each result of light macrocannon shell impact. Sister captain used orbital bombardment to cut off reinforcements from Regna district resulting in 30 kilometers desolate wasteland. Dust blear still covered part of this devastation. I loathed to tally how many civilian people died in this. Certainly much more than soldiers.



Frederick came by to report situation in detail, refraining from any comments about this reckless plan. From information we gathered, it looked like all forces were moved out of planet few days ago, leaving skeleton crew for maintenance. Most of remaining personnel were contracted or indebted workers. Even if counted in thousands, they were not trained and posed little threat overall, falling apart in face of warmaidens.

Huges reported boarding of Starport Gamma with similar result, encountering little resistance. Fighting was still ongoing, but they moved at quick pace to command center. It appeared Blacklight puffed a lot of smoke to mislead us with their numbers. There wasn't enough personnel to man machines and heavy equipment. Frederick asked if I knew anything about it. Being too tired to walk, I tossed him my PDA. It met confusion. He needed instruction to look into new slate. For second, he closed eyes in distaste, clenching jaw, but after moment of browsing, gave it back, leaned on the rail and asked how it found its way to my possession. Even our recon department didn't have capabilities to research it. I only said Kitlana and he decided not to ask questions, but I warned him, she wasn't who he thought she is. Whether in disbelief or desire to know, sat beside me and questioned meaning of my remark, but I told him we both need to talk about it only in presence of Lydia. There were no more answers for him, so we returned to browsing reports.

Once finished, we just sat and enjoyed whatever sun was left that day. He glanced at my PDA surreptitiously so I shared it to feed his curiosity. In about half an hour, transports from orbit finally landed our "reinforcements". Hospitalers came by to look at my wounds. Applied some gel, ointment, prayers and bandages for better healing.

In the evening, sisters contacted us on the radio. Lydia wanted to meet me, us, to talk over our need to quick reaction to new developments. My sore muscles clacked and hurt all the way to briefing room.

Due to access to vast amount of classified data concerning Blacklight's forces, meeting proceeded with only three of us after I vouched for Frederick. We decided this knowledge had to be kept secret from absolutely everyone. Lydia explained to Frederick things about Kitlana and he instantly knew she couldn't have worked alone. Politely and delicately suggested he knew who it was, in manner canoness did not understand. I disclosed there is mini circuit slate in my backpack at Old Valor. To ensure it was properly taken care of, he called Reinhart to retrieve my stuff and send it to palace as priority.

Once that was done, we, mainly those two, could discuss our next move. However before we proceeded, Lydia told us some things about incoming Inquisitor Hakobyan. It seemed that name Markovic we heard before was just totally made up. Other convents have already came in contact with him, but have been instructed to keep silent. She got hold on this knowledge in illicit manner, thanks to her agents.

If that wasn't ominous enough, he hauled Oberon class black ship along. From everything we heard and from hearsay within other convents, it seemed as he was looking for something. One peculiar situation, giving something to think about happened during meeting with Lokinyth fabricator - Schootex.



A: I don't know where those rumors came from, but Lydia received it from sleeper agent within covenant on Demin Glavis, a neighbouring system of Haepestus.

A: I suppose even Lydia didn't know.

A: Kinda. Knowing my way around inquisitors, it didn't leave me much room to improvise or imagine.

According to sources, he saw footage of my assault on the palace and ordered every piece of information containing my image or information destroyed. Those orders have not yet reached subsector Mara, but Lords of Demin glavis, Kata Jay and Hephæstus have already received such notification. For now, his escort stayed and patrolled Hephæstus subsector, searching for something. As far as she knew, there were no other orders than image erasure, but she felt I wasn't long for this world and advised me to run. For first time I saw Frederick wrinkling his eyebrows in such manner. Both of them weren't sure how to understand those orders, but once they would reach Mara . . . they didn't have much choice but to comply.

I told them it was perfect. After all, I never intended to remain there forever. Commissar understood this. He asked carefully if it was about BB . . . but I told him, part in defeat and part in bitterness, that BB didn't exist. It was all a lie made the fuck up by Reitziger, meant to hook me in and manipulate.

Lydia certainly became very much interested who is BB. Frederick waited for me to answer anything. I preferred not to get into detail, but . . . I explained BB was supposed to be only remaining survivor of new bioroid cloning project by Blacklight. People called her, it, Black Betty. According to everyone, she was the most perfect specimen humans could ever imagine. There was disbelief and grit in her voice, expressing disappointment in me, for falling for such devious and planar promises. I tried to defend it, explaining it wasn't about BB herself, but helping to squash human traffic effort, which brought me to point of becoming governor. She evidently didn't buy it, but let go of subject.

Now, she wanted to understand why was I helping out. Or better, how in Emperor's holy name was I so powerful, so perfectly pitched into place and time. How come I was so competent in so many areas no one ever had business ever being. It surprised me to know nobody told her about my perpetual nature. It was even bigger surprise to her. This shed light over how and why it wasn't just a chance. She gloomied down, looking at holograph. Asked if I ever had anything to do with inquisition before. This was hard to answer, because . . . I sort of did, but never in official way. Not even radicals admitted to making use of my assistance.

We stood like that for moment, until I advised both of them to let me handle inquisition on my own. They should direct their attention on war in front of us. I brought up fleet manifesto from one of orders I saw on the ship. Frederick didn't say a word about change of subject, while Lydia looked at me in disappointment. We all could reckon my silence was as admission as voiced affirmation. I broke silence directing their attention at display. This looked to them as legitimate, up to date stamp. Lydia shook off whatever bothered her and returned to her normal



self. From get go, plan was obvious to her.

Sisters from order have been hunting cultists on all planets and colonies, stretching thin all their forces. Pulling them together was not an option, fearing heretics would feel easing of leash. Since it was only a matter of time, military forces cleaned up whatever remained out of separatists. It would be smart to cut off any supplies to their main base of operations and perform lengthy siege. Shogo was very big planet with lots of inhabitants. Its hive cities provided workforce in whole sector and beyond. Everyday millions of people left Shogo in periodic contracts. Even Mara contracted almost 786 million workers from Shogo every year. Cutting it off would seriously impacted our output. It already did by 20% due to lack of food, and that would only deepen with a siege. All three agri worlds would suffer worker shortage, further increasing deficit, which is not something we intended. On the other hand, it was additional 40 000 000 000 people to feed.

We had logistic data to support all out war with cultists. From what we saw in metrics there was almost over 43 million mercenaries waiting for an order. It staggered us to see they concentrated most of those numbers in one place, emptying whole sector. Given that Mara is fairly far away from Shogo, almost four weeks of travel, it all had to be planned beforehand with incredible diligence. The more we dug deeper, the more nonsensical it looked. They concentrated 58 ships in one star system, leaving only 24 for their hit and run tactics in whole sector. Even more strange was its distance to capital. Hephaestus as well as Lokinyth are just six days of travel away. They either tried to build up huge flooding wave of power, or were afraid of capital's involvement, or . . . I don't know. I mean, I know now, but . . . let's just continue.

After hours of looking into data, we decided to direct our efforts on concentrating available fleet for major, decisive assault. Little information we received from Shogo never said anything about any kind of unrest, riots or planetary revolution. Even if we had their classified information, it was few weeks dated. On top of everything their decisions did not make sense . . . for us, of course.

Our dilemmas were disrupted by Greta knocking on the door. Sisters finished their assignments and awaited further orders. It was already after 25:00 local, so we decided to postpone till morning. For first time I felt awkward sitting in silence with Frederick. While he continued to look through more and more charts, reports, plans and prints, I sat in the chair thinking about what to do with all this mess . . . ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh . . . Looking at it, from 10 000 miles view, my hasty decisions led to unfortunate turn of events. Despite putting all the effort and experience behind me, it still felt like convoluted . . . asinine. It seemed as we were missing something very important. Like I was missing something very important.

A piece of puzzle allowing us to see method in this madness . . .

I don't even remember when I fell asleep.



— Arrival Day [126] — Pursuit day [112] — Day of reign [80_] —

But when I woke up, he was still reading through. At first moment, shot of adrenaline filled my body with anxiety, thinking he saw hidden data, but then I quickly calmed down, remembering it was encrypted.

He greeted me with smile, stating it was not my bedroom anymore and I shouldn't be so surprised to see him. Now that I think of it . . . I really did get used to my new life as governor by that point . You know . . . maybe not so much for office, or power of the capacity, but . . . a place to stay. It was nice having palace of my own. Maybe not a home yet, but still . . ehhhhhhhhhhhhh . . .

Anyway, I got up and searched for quartermaster, asking for any hope of breakfast. With deepest regrets and apologies, he informed me there was no classy dishes available even for me. Staff was under direct scrutiny of sisters checking upon them and kitchen has been poorly supplied even before our arrival. They only had canned food, but I was fine with that.

We sat together in dining hall, scraping whatever those cans were filled with. It certainly did not remind of meat. Maybe if mixed with styrofoam and chemical stimulants. And a bit of cardboard for taste. I promised soldiers their rations will see severe rise in quality. Caloric biscuits for supplementary diet, even though rock hard now, were at least well done and actually tasted like bakery.

It was a good occasion to ask colonel about state of our soldiers and everyone captured. As per my promise, combatants were put in cells until further notice, while workers returned to their duties. Thanks to presence of Sisters of Battle morale was very high, even despite large losses, to which they already got used to. According to his report, 67% of 1350 guardsmen died. Their bodies designated for burial, dogtags would be returned to families.

As to defenders . . . well . . . almost 7000 dead, with half of them dead because of sororitas' sweep. We rose a glass of water to the fallen and continued with report.

They also received radio announcement from vice-governor Maroo, calling all troops to honor the deal I announced yesterday. Soldiers were glad that someone finally saw them as humans, not just as metric or statistic. I asked them few things about how local troops have been dealing with planetary situation of civil war, famine and overall population unrest. It gave me few pointers what should be done next.

I returned to Frederick who was still scrolling all available data. Even though I told him about cans, he smirked and declined. Said that if I was able to eat that industrial waste, there wouldn't be much worse poison to test me. Another thing was immediate communication from Maroo, trying to report their success of boarding operation. Huges has been busy with inspection of all forces stationed there, deciding what to do with them. There also was another commissar who worked with Blacklight. He awaited judgment in his holding cell. I asked Frederick what was his opinion on this matter. As far as he was concerned, Robert De Shable was good man, but severely misdirected by years of bad influence from SoS. They knew each other only by random encounters after he posted him there. He knew how their "justice" worked, but the over all judgment



should be left with Imperium . . . which meant nobody, for very long time in this case. Our law enforcement was cut short due to conscription. Searching for anyone versed in Lex Imperialis for this purpose was as arduous as finding Adeptus Arbites in those parts. Right now, Adeptus Administratum had to process judgment calls from sororitas and . . . you know how they work.

Since Lydia was getting late, I asked him, if he found anything useful in this data dumpster. It was all something helping us, but he brought up issue of earliest commands. Apparently, even uprising was considered much earlier, as much as four years before, but Reitziger convinced von Rosette there would be better opportunity in future to seize all power, not just partially. He pulled up dispatches three years old, between those two. In series of correspondence, Edmund spoke of wheels of fate turning and once they lock in, there would be no possible failure. There even was mentioning how SIN was pleased to see Ervin's effort in supply of new servants, but it was first time I saw anyone discredit SIN. Reitziger told von Rosette that he is not as powerful or intelligent as he thinks, which resulted in very abrupt and foul message, cutting this correspondence

On that note, he showed me transportation declaration from certain place. Mechanisms, machines, resources and people but never a returning manifest. Something was delivered and nobody ever came back. Not even freighters themselves. By searching deeper, in all data available to him, me, I mean governor office, we were able to look more or less into ship program manifest in local Logistics branch for few years past. My direct order worked like gold and we had this data in two hours.

Whole procedure was hastened two years ago by Amschel with direct order to allow one corporation to pass without declaring ship manifest. All ships departing from Mara hauled "building materials" towards ILU-2. Last freighter departed three months ago. With little access to flight records we had at High Command, we could crosscheck names of vessels. All belonged to de Estana subsidiary, and all never appeared again after departing for ILU-2. It looked like another black site still in use. We could think of only one person still in need of such place, especially when whole organization was preparing for war.

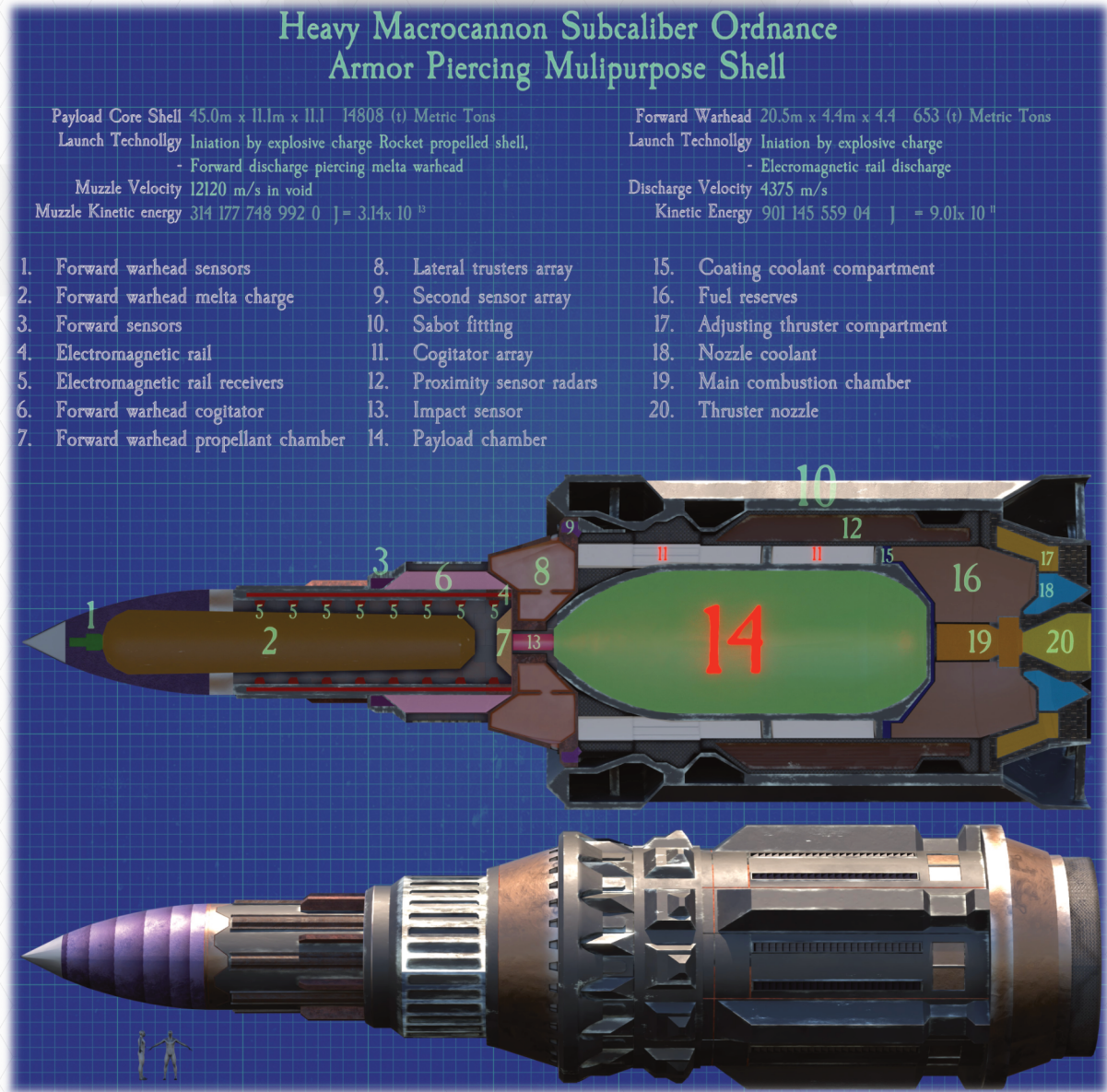
It was already evening when we had enough data to put pieces together. I fell silent for a moment. Frederick knew what it meant for me, not as governor but as my own self. He just eyed me suspiciously, looking for glimmer of sanity. Even without a word from me, he already understood my desire to go there. To finally see for myself if all I have . . . been promised, had any truth to begin with. He understood my determination and didn't try to convince me it was bad idea. One thing was sure. Reitziger wouldn't leave any trace implicating himself, he was too smart for that, but . . . he left this in database. He knew we would notice it somehow. That I would notice and piece it together. Maybe not in such short time, but surely he anticipated it. Commissar talked it over with me from top to bottom many times over, being vehemently against my solo departure, constantly remembering my presence wasn't going to last anyway. His intention was to keep me involved in major operation, leaving recon to fleet. I can't say if he was considerate or afraid I would vanish forever. We both agreed however, departure to such place was too risky alone.

I decided to wait for Patricia to arrive and then leave for ILU-2. It was just 17, 18 days of travel anyway. If we took a quick ship then even 8 or 9. If we could catch one equipped with heretek, even 3 . . . We both promised to keep it to



ourselves and keep my real reasons hidden. When Lydia arrived, we stuck to talking over immediate war plan.

It was dark already when we finished. Partially due to heavy clouds. Without unnecessary words, we departed to our own ways. She returned with sisters to Blue Rosary, while we made sure to dispatch new orders to High Command and Central Command. By 26:30 Valkyrie took us back to palace. Flight took us 8 hours, counting in refueling.





— Arrival Day [127] — Pursuit day [113] — Day of reign [81_] —

Before anything else, I needed to go to High command and request escort vessel for my personal travel. Kwintet had troubles believing I would order a flying launchbox, but he arranged quickest warp capable ship in the fleet. Frederick voiced his objections how reckless it would be to travel in solitary frigate. Even despite my demands, Admiral and Commissar refused to comply. It forced me to write down official order and stick it on Kwintet's desk. With heavy heart, Russel had no other choice but to yield. Feeling a bit frustrated, I got out and returned to spire.

Back at palace, Frederick has been given personal copy of entries on my PDA useful to our efforts. We kept it quiet and secretive. He went with my whims as long as I focused on helping him bring this world back into Imperium's grace. We finished somewhere near 20 hours. He went ahead to Central Command to take closer look at all information. I locked doors and pulled curtains after he left, telling Nataniel to hold all visitations, because I was tired.

For whole night, I read through everything Reitziger left me. Considering vast scope of fleet data, what he wrote to me was meagerly nonexistent. Maybe hundred pages over multiple areas.

As promised, he sent detailed instructions how I should deal with incoming inquisitor. He knew his identity as well as his inclinations. According to Edmund, Tigran Hakobyan was old and radical leaning Lord Inquisitor, who had few friends and fewer enemies. Because of his self-reliant mode of operations, comprised mostly of hunting for hardest criminals or heretics, he was intrinsically woven within Black Fleet and Adeptus Investagates. In his conclave, there was nobody wanting to help or kill him, due to being so detached from center of powers. Not much was known about his person, but due his track of conduct, there was no doubt he had interest in someone in sector. Whatever scraps of information there was, painted him as pragmatic before everything. Edmund warned me to not underestimate him, as he was psyker himself and undergone body enhancements allowing him to effectively wear Astartes grade power armor. Due to his inclination, it could be enhanced with some undisclosed xeno technology. As person, he was very elaborate and plentiful in high gothic, elaborate, decorative speech. His orders were short and succinct to point of paucity. At the very bottom of page, which was easy to miss, in very small print, he added that had I ever challenged him, I must see fight till the very end, no matter its outcome, or he will sniff my weakness and apply most egregious methods to break it. His preceding reputation in outer edges of galaxy claimed he never, ever failed to hunt down his targets.

Apart from technical instructions, there were entries about how I should use data provided and how to plan effort against it. He did not delineate any plan but gave me pointers and rules of thumb when it came to ground, vehicle and fleet battle. Costs, required materials, routes, all logistical needs for waging quick or prolonged war. Most frightening part is that it all overlapped in large part what I learned back at Terra. Some of those seemed like brushing up on my war lessons from master Aurelio.

I found there few pages about how SoS organized their chaos worship on



few planets, how SIN liked to conduct it by puppets, how Drukhari effectively manipulated Ervin, unlike the other way around he liked to proclaim.

He confessed, that it was no one else than Marcus de Estana, grandfather of Tulio, who introduced helping hand of dark Eldar to his business, which skyrocketed his profits to most wealthy magnate on planet. He, then introduced his son and Ervin to possibilities of outside intervention, who tasting the power, decided to make it their own. They thought they were using Drukhari, but in the end, they have been used themselves. It all ended once he introduced new bioroid project. This made both of them obsolete and Drukhari have become cordially dependent on his creations.

In few words, he reminded me of who I saw on raider barge, without clarifying which was real one, leaving choice up to me. Later, I discovered true purpose of this whole . . . circus. But that was much later.

At that time, all I could do was to follow the evidence.

This was last page he wrote for me. Sketch. The only word, written on top was “enjoy”, underneath it . . . a depiction of what was supposed to be Black Betty. Astonishingly beautiful drawing of young, pristine girl, sitting sideways on chair in front of table, and holding teapot. Just as wonderful in size as were all clones, but with black, long, straight hair spread over long dress. Thanks to its vectorization, I could zoom in on her wonderful, immaculate face sprinkled with few freckles on cheeks. Gaze of her eyes so captivating and alluring to point of boiling my blood, despite being mere picture. It was so beautiful . . . I felt it had to be fake . . . They were all Slaanesh worshipers . . . Such depictions of lust were not only desired, but normal thing for them. Imaginative wishes. And as it is with chaos . . . real thing never looks as good as that. Maybe my mind finally dropped unattainable fantasies to take a good, honest look at world around me. This . . . blissful visage hunted me through night.



— Arrival Day [128] — Pursuit day [114] — Day of reign [82_] —

After waking up at 9 to ringing door bell, I noticed three unanswered calls from Frederick on my PDA. He finally came to see me personally.

There was serious situation developing around Batatus mining guild. Most secession troops capitulated and were on their way to resocialization facilities, even though most of officer staff didn't like it and voiced their rebellious opinions in unicen. I asked what actually are those "resocialization" facilities. Just as I presumed, a concentration camps where dissidents and criminals slaved away at work their sentences. I thought everyone at palace knew how much I disliked easy workarounds of any problem. Commissar stood by his decision. It was barely million captured combatants against 8 billion population. There was no better and more decisive decision ensuring there would be no more insurrections. He averted his gaze when I asked how many of them are being sent for servitorization. With heavy and almost hostile tone said "all of them".

If there was any power in my governor position, I commanded him to reverse all those orders and create separate four regiments out of those captured soldiers and send them to Riktus Prime. Quite a fire starter. And day only begun. I sent him to prepare me breakfast in office.

Olsmo, Mastaf, Kimbly and Ojik already waited for me. Due to severity of ongoing events I had to respond to calls of mayors and overseers in Maroo's absence. They acted as surrogate, gathering pleas, questions and plans awaiting approval. Doing paperwork.

Most pressing was advancement of general Karnak, who has reached Batatus mining district. Soldiers stationed there didn't want to surrender and fought on. He waited for instructions how to handle situation. Due to severity of fighting over Olman Fields and whole district, he lost half of his men already. Thanks to reinforcements he could win by factor of attrition, but asked for help to avoid unnecessary casualties. Since sisters prepared warhound for departure, I ordered him to wait for Sororitas and adjust their coordination with order. He was to rest for time being.

There were severe problems with guilds. Something had to be done with corporations who supplied and worked for Blacklight. I decided to nationalize them. And . . . sent for sisters to perform an audit of those noble houses. This would suffice as their punishment. Damnable game of wealth stripped even official Imperial authority from control. Good thing though, we could take it back with force.

Another issue came up with mayor Myon of Olman district. Soldiers discovered his ties to underworld, local gangs, who have been already been largely eradicated by Karnak's forces, or at least such was the report. Normally, there would be no second thought about his execution, but he claimed it was all his dealing have been supervised under my command. Well . . . His only saving grace was connection to Reitziger. And since I was on my way to chase after ILU-2 black site, there would not be time or opportunity to drain those connections from his head. He was to be released from holding cell and put under house arrest until further notice. For time being, Karnak would take over authority of district and point new mayor in his place. Fredrick was mighty skeptical about his ability to



do so, however we all knew things like this had to be done quickly, least our food production plummeted again.

My time in office saw unprecedented contempt for any bureaucratic conduct. Most of my decisions weren't even written, not to mention its legitimacy by standards of Lex Imperialis. This is part Mastaf liked the most about me - getting things done. He always said that to win a war you need to do whatever it takes. By any means necessary.

Last but not least, Frederick forwarded me commendation of brigador Emanuel Mastaf for promotion to general. People at Central Command decided it was about time he received long deserved recognition for his actions. He, himself did not expect it. I have to admit I had multiple second thoughts about it. It's not everyday anybody can get promoted to status of general within ranks of Astra Militarum. Awarding him his first star was very . . . mixed feelings, since I didn't really know him that much for any length of time. Sure, we saw him in action both in command and in actual fighting, but would it warrant this promotion . . . pffffffffffffffffffffffff . . . I had doubts. But in the end I accepted his candidacy.

They greeted this decision with laud applaud and congratulations. Kimbly even prepared champagne for this occasion. I . . . was more reserved. Mastaf, even though now technically over rank of Commissar General, was still treated like underling to him. And to Emanuel, Frederick was still a force to be reckoned with. Well, in fact for everyone. There was no soldier or citizen not knowing his name or exemplary record of servitude to Imperium. So much, that every child is taught his name when learning about history of Mara. I just wondered how would they spin his servitude with Amschel's fall, but that is another story.

Work that day went smooth. We pulled our efforts to swiftly resolve all issues and by 18 hours we had everything wrapped up. We finally opened champagne few minutes later. High Command called in to inform about escort vessels with canoness Patricia on board. Incidentally, Gaze of Void, our avenger grand cruiser was called over for nothing. I cannot imagine disappointment of her captain. Another fine logistic endeavor on Imperium's part . . . ohhhhhhhhhhhh sweet Imperium . . .

Mastaf proposed I take Avenger for my travel as it had much greater chance of success than my frigate speedrun. Everybody nagged me to do so. For moment I even did consider it, but ultimately it was a personal issue, not a problem of Imperium. Well, It was. But not entirely. Pfffffffffff . . . I just . . . wanted to do it alone, knowing Reitziger invited me.

Later that evening, we received communication from canoness, announcing their schedule. Before they would arrive as my bodyguards, they needed resupply at monastery. Frederick tried to call them to speak in person, but all comm attempts were rejected. Message in text only. I already had a bad feeling.

We all presumed sisters put on me their most . . . trustful members to ensure I wasn't a secretive cultist, but this behavior was outside of box even for me. To know my "enemy" called for drastic step.

Palatine Martha was in training session with her sisters in ecclesiarchy quarters. Rounds of melee combat mixed with weight strength training. Twenty sisters were in motion, while ten stood under wall, chanting songs out of books. Serf girls of priestess Greta announced me before I could enter gymnasium.

Martha . . . well, was amused and intrigued. At first, she asked if I wanted



to join their training but responded herself that I wouldn't be able to keep up with sisters. When she heard I wished to learn about canoness Patricia, her eyes narrowed, brows came together and her hands readied at hips. She wouldn't see a reason to share any sensitive information with me. "sensitive" piqued my interest. I asked how sensitive it could be if Lydia appointed her as my bodyguard. She bursted in laugh and I heard some giggles from sisters in background. They didn't believe it until seeing her message correspondence on my PDA, giving me surprised and pitiful look, trying to hold something back.

It wasn't in her capacity to disclose parts of her assignments, but she told me, someone did me dirty. Assigning Patricia to me was like putting a mobile cage around me. Most of canoness's work remained classified even within order, which only her purifier squads and other cononesses knew about. Order treated her as first and last resort to any problem. From all sisters in the order, she was someone I couldn't reason with. Her duty and mission came as first, no matter the cost. Any cost. Her troops stationed at monastery least of all, but when they do, period of silence and rigidity spreads. No one, except Janna, dared to address her directly and only Janna had any real authority over her. According to Martha, she wouldn't be appointed as my bodyguard even if Lydia had full power over order. To her, it meant Patricia decided this on her own or was directed by higher powers. Since heretical act of ecclesiarchy at Ministorum, there was nobody who could directly order sisterhood. Even my treaty with Janna wasn't a full control, only commandeering. She advised me to speak with Lydia about this peculiar situation.

Bowing nicely and thanking for information left sisters with mixed gazes. As soon we walked out, Martha called girls in, returning to training.

I tried to call Lydia on my way back, up to no avail. Field command said sisters were already sweeping outskirts of Regna and moving towards Hydroponic farms. Lydia took most of what Huges provided and stormed out of citadel to bring whole district under control. It would be hard to contact her now.

This effectively kicked me out of good mood. From what I just heard, sisterhood put a nook around my neck, waiting for ample opportunity to tighten it. Once back in my room, I perused through data Edmund left me in search of any hints about it, but no . . . There were none. These thoughts of Patricia didn't let me sleep. Her reputation looked . . . mysterious. I imagined various situations and lines of talk when possibly addressing her or talking over my journey. Taking shower helped to chase away those thoughts.



I woke up at 11 in the morning. Not being bothered by anyone seemed suspicious. There was no officer or soldier in whole upper spire. Nataniel explained that Frederick sent out all capable hands on the front line, to ensure swift transition of ownership from persecuted corporations. He himself departed for Regna city, taking my alleged command squad along, to put Mastaf's new rank to work. Housecarl told me commissar left explanation letter in the office.

I wasn't in mood to read anything that day, going to dining hall instead. Memories of how I made history with bottle or our pact with Olsmo came back as I gazed outside. Everything remained as day we met. This time it was . . . lonely. Empty. Even if there were serfs around . . . it still felt lonely. I suppose I got used to everybody's present in my daily life. Mere three months of this life left deep mark on my path. I couldn't enjoy it anymore, knowing it would end prematurely. Not because of inquisitor . . .

He . . . was quiet. Hiding deep beneath astral plane. Waiting. I know how it sounds, but . . . he was never wrong about his . . . "tribute". And I knew it came closer and closer. Like calm before the storm, he rested. Completely ignored me. Not even a thought coming from him. Like water, adjusted to whatever shaped it. Whatever I called forth. That is why I wasn't . . . damaged at citadel. He let me use power, not feasting on those energies. Fasting . . . It scared me even more than his ravenous hunger. So much, I lost any appetite.

Just as I was pottering in my chocolate ice cream chalice, courier came to pass me urgent message from High Command about vessel I requested. Kwintet managed to prepare line destroyer Red Pot. Its captain was all honored to be of service to me, ect. Length of barely 1 km and operating personnel of 500, designed as light transport for Astra Minitarum, usually hauling 12 000 soldiers, appropriately equipped in officer quarters for me and for my entourage. Equipped with macrocannon battery. Light and nimble, capable of making my trip in under 4 days.

Admiral heard that Sororitas appointed their sisters as my bodyguard and needed to put in manifest my retinue. I had to communicate with Monastery to reach Patricia. Dispatcher was unusually quiet, comprehensive and cooperative. Very hasty. She sounded like worker whose boss is looking over shoulder. With a whip. I began to doubt if she was the same sister who handled me before.

Despite cooperative attempts, I still couldn't reach canoness. She tried to help me once I explained the issue, patching through other sister superiors' responsible for logistics. Due to lengthy process, dispatcher asked me to call in hour. We directed courier to guest room so he could wait, while I came back to room. Calling Monastery in promised hour, I was finally able to fill in this manifest. With staggering number. Apparently Patricia took her whole commandery of 300 sisters to serve as my bodyguards. 312 exactly. They also expressed need of additional space for heavy equipment. I still couldn't get direct communication with canoness. To sooth my impatience, Palatine Leonida herself spoke to me about this case. She wished she could tell me more, but outside strictly business cases, they couldn't be of assistance. Very startling to hear her being so polite. I could only assume sisters really felt whip over their heads. I



thought Leo was that kind of whip over everyone. It seriously made my imagination run wild.

Whatever the case, Monastery informed me that canoness would be ready for departure in the morning. On behalf of sister Patricia, she accepted to arrive at 10 hours local on pier 12-B to board ship. It was also mandatory sisters themselves picked me up from palace to transport me. After moment of unintelligible chatter on the other side, Leonida informed me to wait at my landing pad by 9. All was confirmed with pleasant farewell.

Courier from Administratum departed somewhere after 15 hour local. With nothing better to do, I finally went to office to read that letter. Decorated envelope, sealed with Aquila sigil. Thin, almost transparent. There was only one piece of paper inside, few words of somewhat hectic handwriting with only one sentence, which belonged to commissar; "I don't know why you chase after Reitziger but be warned. He will betray you like everybody else". Way this message has been written turned out very twofold and ominous.

Should I be wary of Reitziger or those around me, already plotting against me. This sounded so ambiguous it might have not exist at all. Besides . . . I already knew he played with me and there was nothing I could do to change it. Every time I tried to fight, it would only further his plan. And now, when he had my blood, Emperor one knows what kind of monstrosities he has been breeding in this laboratory. For moment, I wanted to drop this expedition, knowing with certainty it was a trap after all. I only hoped he didn't count for 300 sisters to tail me.

What else could I do to fight it? Well, for starters I could just do nothing. That would effectively dump all his plans, but I could not imagined it at that time. At that time, all I thought about was getting rid of chaos cults, believing there was still time before incursion happened. If it was just plain and simple greed of power, I would let it slide, yet this . . . no. There was no walking by it. Age experience dictated to follow to the root of the problem in order to vanquish the tree of pestilence and right then . . . everything pointed to Reitziger as focal point of this madness . . .



— Arrival Day [130] — Pursuit day [116] — Day of reign [84_] —

It was first day of winter on Mara. Even so, it wasn't anything severe. Due to stable orbit and rotation, planet was warm all year long with only two actual seasons which differed by only few degrees of warmth. The very hot and mildly warm period. Because of this, crops could be planted and harvested whole year long. Only high mountains had cold temperatures.

I remember how our staff started to talk about this year Vervecht's festival. Nataniel explained how due to low food supply as of late, festival of fertility would not happen. Usually little surplus is stashed away every year to setup giant festival in Ridion district, which was more like tourist and healthcare center on planet.

It presented perfect opportunity for me. Both as morale boost AND as power play. If people saw festival come to pass, there would be less unrest in addition to showing people I could take care of them even in time of need.

It wasn't even 7 in the morning before I contacted High Command to hurry up supply scooping expedition. Commodore was very understanding and agreed with my approach, but complained about yet another thinning out of our forces. He required authorization up front, since I was about to depart. Well . . gathering forces to attack Shogo would have wait few weeks more. They weren't going anywhere anyway.

Waiting for sisters made me shiver in excitement and anticipation. At one hand, there was Patricia and on the other, Edmund. There was no telling what kind of wrench she could throw in his plan. Or mine. Few minutes before 9, Martha came to office informing me about imminent arrival of canoness.

We moved to landing pad in preparation. Few minutes of looking down at Elkor calmed me down. Tasting fresh air breeze, still humid from night's rain, in rays of warm sunshine, have a gift of uplifting. All of it was cut like knife when I saw three black Valkyries approaching from behind mountain ridge. Even if still small like grains of salt, it boded very bleak time of journey. Thirty second later, AVs made surrounding approach around capital spire. All three landed in formation, separated only by few meters. Side hatches opened in slow but orderly fashion, yet only Patricia and her two celestians walked out of craft.

Their sight was . . . surprising. Clad in most plain and most purposeful armor, devoid of any insignia, save for sisterhood sigil on chest plate. No cape or shoulder pad skirts. No silver arabesques or even trimmings. Just plain metal.

She herself was shorter than me. At height of my eyes. As for canoness of Order of Laurel Crown, her body presented meager posture. Most distinguishing feature however was her beauty. She looked . . . just like the fantastic drawing I saw from Reitziger, with only exception being hair. Short. Even shorter than usual bob haircut worn by sisters, neatly brushed to left side. But man . . . Those eyes. So damn big and glittering with green, nebulous colors. So vibrant and vivid like painted with neon brush. So . . . sparkly, glittering as gems.

But there was hollowness in her sight. Unlike smiling picture, she . . . looked like stone cold calculator who saw too much in their life to care anymore. For herself, or you. I know this stare. I have been there already many times. Last



stop before madness. The great void of indifference that pushes us to untold limits when we don't care to live anymore. Someone with nothing to loose.

Her bodyguards however . . . well . . . those sisters looked like two muscle tree beefcakes, whose size rivaled that of Huges and Olsmo. However, despite their . . . mass, still looked kinda pretty. Just from thickness of their armor I could surmise diameters of their arms were thicker than my legs. I shit you not. Even Martha looked at them like something was wrong with this whole commandery.

All women inside transports looked like that. And this makes you wonder . . . how girl like this . . . almost a teenage girl, makes to the top of such army.

There wasn't much greeting or words at all. She acknowledged famulous with a nod and bid me good morning, preparing a handshake. It immediately explained what was going on. Her grip was firm like vice. Even though her body did not have mass behind it, her muscles were veeeeeeeery firm. It was just a second or two but she definitively tried to gauge me with this. My own body might not remind a primarch, but due to longevity and specifics of my genes, it certainly is denser and sturdier than all other people. She relaxed grip as soon as I responded with strength.

Without unnecessary roundabouts, she announced she would not allow me to take personal transport. Without moment to speak back, Patricia pointed at Nataniel to bring my luggage to Valkyrie. I tried to ask her what is is about, but she just ignored me and paced back to transport. Her two celestians approached Albatross to haul whatever I had prepared. It was first time I saw Sororitas wink in surprise at size of my suitcase. Unlike normal nobles in such position, I managed to pack one case for clothes and one for armor, not much bigger than instrument cases.

All operation completed in total silence. Martha and her squad stood politely, avoiding gaze of canoness, who watched them diligently from Valkyrie's door. It wasn't a good sign at all. I honestly preferred my Sororitas rakish and vociferous. At least I knew what was on their mind. This silence reminded grave dead, waking a bad feeling about this.

3 purifiers accompanied us inside. Engines started even before we took seat and flew us out as soon I secured harness. All this time Patricia eyed me constantly. I suspect she wanted to see my reaction when she told me we weren't going to take transport Admiral Kwintet prepared. Well, it was somehow anticipated on my side so she wouldn't see me cry about it. It was very uncomfortable to even look straight, as she sat across me. There was no assuring or anything at all. We flew in silence, listening to engine roar.

Watching vid from outside cameras made it clear we weren't heading to starport Alpha, but further into the void. I tried to ask where were they taking me, but canoness just said "you will see once we arrive".

To break silence again, I try ask names of sisters who escort us, but it apparently wasn't something I should bother my mind with. Yep. Great. I already felt funtime ahead. Most exciting trip ever.

Our flight finally reached outside gravity well of Mara after almost thirty minutes. In darkness of void, cameras had hard time picking up black vessel, but it wasn't a Black Ship. At first, my heart jumped to my stomach, but the closer we got, the clearer shilouette of Nova frigate became. Normally reserved only for Space Marines, but somehow order managed to get their hands on it. Even more,



they operated it all by themselves. Martha wasn't joking when equating her "protection" to cage. Sisters wouldn't even tell me name of the ship.

I visited such frigate only once, for two standard years, flying with Nova Marines somewhere around year 400 of M37. Ehhhhhhhhhhh . . . This time instead of only men, we have only women. And I don't know which is worse.

Valkyries landed deep in hangar, at first bay, next to main entrance. Patricia explained nothing. As we disembarked, I tried to take a look around to at least partially understand situation. Few sisters checked upon hangar full of ships. It was designed to house Thunderhawk and perhaps few Storm Eagles, but this one was clearly redesigned. I counted 16 Valkyries. Some of them in process of refurbishing and rearming.

I posed question to canoness, did she even knew where my journey would take us. She heard everything from admiral and admitted my choice of destination seemed weird, but that was the extension of her knowledge. And conversation. No matter how much I tried to engage her with small talk, all she could give me was short and concise moans or not respond at all. We passed servitors welding pipes and structure plates in one of corridors, under command of one of engineer sisters.

Few acolytes and workers on the way have been eyeing me strangely, like they wanted to knife me in between ribs. Two techpriestess passed by, informed canoness about finished survey of sections 4 through 7 and have been told to take it to next sectors.

Unlike everything else I saw within order, walls of that ship have remained barren. Miles of plain, gray rockcrete or bland metal plates. Lack of resources or excruciating lack of finesse? Probably both. Not even marines left their hallways empty like basement. Even trenches felt inviting compared to that.

Girls took me to officer quarters, where my own "apartment" was prepared. First thing scouring my eyes were massive plates of blast gate. Chamber was somewhat decorated with pilasters and arches under walls. Something to break stone monotony. At least it was spacious, can't deny that. Big room which looked like lounge, a bedroom and my own bathroom. Even a mock up of stained glass window illuminated by lights. Furnishing was quite on the rough end. Purposeful. Heavy, thick planks bolted onto each other with heavy screws. This certainly wasn't a health resort but for premises of the situation, it didn't look bad. Obviously serving as my personal prison cell. Maybe not outright, but the heavy duty blast gate should be used in a nuke bunker not as entrance door.

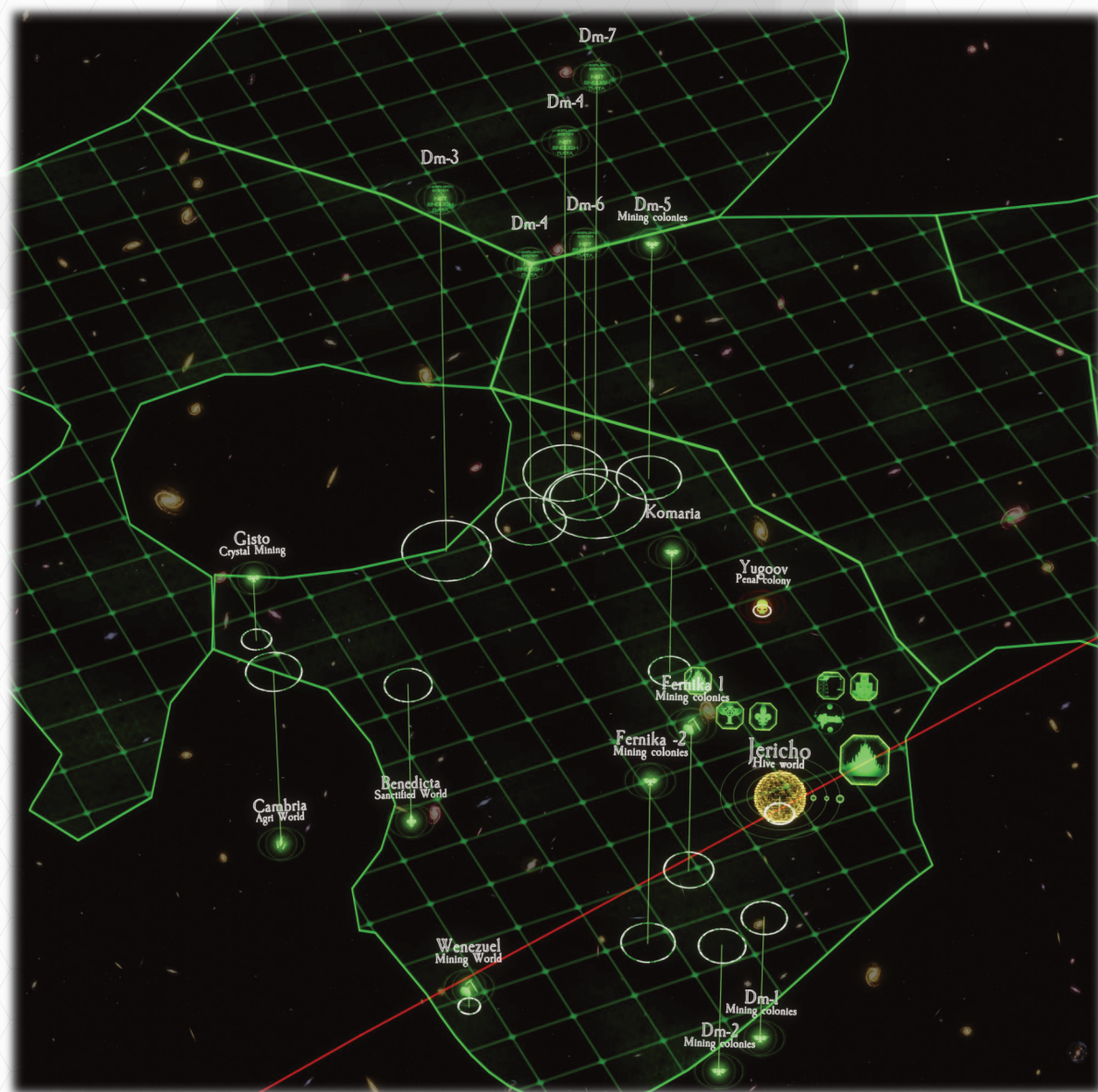
Ehhhhhhhhhhh . . . I asked if she put me under arrest or something. She responded with "if you say so", in manner clearly giving me hints to how little attention she put over my governorship. Worst of all, she never displayed any kind of feelings or emotions towards me, not even funny face or smirks of contempt.

I sat on chair at desk to wonder if they would survey me all the time. In minute or two, another sister came in, announcing herself to us before entering.

Sali was acolyte in training for retributor squads and designated as my direct middleman between Patricia. When warmaidens left, she came closer. With a simple bow of her head, appreciated my presence on their ship and elucidated situation a bit. We talked about what were tenants of my presence and how free I was on the ship. Due to being a male, she explicitly explained I would be very disruptive to their everyday tasks. It would be "dangerous" for me to roam free.



Palatine Dagmara, third in command aboard ship, setup a two hour window for me every day if I wanted to use gymnasium for training. All meals and messages would be delivered by servitor. Soooooooooooooo TECHNICALLY I wasn't imprisoned. I COULD walk around, but . . . I mean, you all have more then enough experience to know what it entails.



— Arrival Day [136] — Pursuit day [126] — Day of reign [90_] —

Such were my next 6 days. Time allocated for my training was scheduled early in the morning. At this point, return to standard time seemed like boulder rolling over me. I couldn't get in the rhythm.

Upon our arrival at ILU-2, Sali came to escort me to the bridge in cover of six bodyguards, as you can imagine, towering over me. And around me. Maybe it is my bias, but . . .

A: No. not at all.

A: Nobody knew, or rather wasn't sure, about why order became what it is now. I had my suspicions, but . . . just listen till the end. There is not much more to tell about it now. If I told you why now, it wouldn't make much sense, but there was a reason why retributor ended up . . . beefed up so much. Besides you have it in report already.

A: let me see.

A: Well , there really is not much. And there are some misconstrued sections. Who prepared this?

A: Alright. I get it now. No, what you read in this is not really true. Not entirely. Only section 4 and 5. Conclusions of this "investigation" is bonkers as well.

A: That is because nobody saw what I saw. And nobody cared to know or even ask. Out of all people you should know how hard it is to complete data about such . . . remote and obscure case.

Canoness wished to speak with me about our actual purpose, because nobody knew anything at this point. Sisters never even asked me about it before.

War room looked cozy compared to rest of the ship. They seated me in comfortable chair on the opposite side of table. Patricia finished gathering stacks of papers. She brought up whatever was known about three planets of the system on display and we started to talk about actual purpose of this expedition. One of techpriestess helped us with noosphere navigation. As one can expect, whole command center put into doubt possible presence of any significant threat in such remote place. Palatine Dagmara begun to question me as at interrogation, keeping mediocre reservation. Considering situation, it felt enticing to cooperate. Patricia wouldn't relent in asking and asking the same question in different manner, digging more and more into my shell. They really didn't appreciate holding back information. Mainly about source of my knowledge. But my past as well.

You know, they had whatever was left of their access to inquisitorial database, which had no entries corresponding to my type or range of powers. Or genetic makeup. Unlike most of prejudiced idiots, they didn't see mixed genetics to call me half-bred but also no mutations like with normal psykers. Magos Genetor in service on board displayed great reservation towards my bodily as well as psychic abilities, incapable of understanding its source. Most of all, impossible genetic purity, surpassing every guidelines in her field, on par only with original templates from Terra.



They stretched interrogation for over 5 hours. Seeing Dagmara wasn't making much progress, canoness made a hand gesture towards other celestians. Sisters left room in slow succession. Only main priestess and servitors manning instruments remained.

She waited until everyone departed to change her posture, instantly reminding Janna in biomechanic conduct. I imagined she must have trained under her for quite long time. Even crossed legs and arms in exact manner. As soon as I probed surrounding for psychic intrusion, diagram flashed over center noosphere. Priestess sent it to our table display. It contained telemetry data sensors picked up. Mainly wavelengths and my brain activity. Pat looked at screen, glancing at me few times.

Overlapping lines and cells filled with digits interested her more than me or anything else. After few minutes of silence, she asked me what did I try to do. My explanation piqued her curiosity, telling me to do it again. As soon as I opened witch sight, she looked at me, probing state of my alertness. Energetic sea around us remained calm. Only presence of astropaths flew through ether, but looking around, I noticed a wide, black line over planet surface. If it wasn't for canoness eyeing pistol at edge of table, I would have focused more. Even if there was no immediate danger of death, I surely wanted to get pack to palace without unnecessary complications.

Something wasn't right, though. She turned to priestess because graph has been wholly filled. Even metric cells have been obscured. According to our specialist, everything was working fine. Data detected sudden spike of wavelength energy on all thresholds and wavelengths, which . . . normally is not safe. Psykers enter state of ELF waves to communicate and EHW to draw power from warp, and every time it is confined in certain range of material energy. I fire up on all channels at the same time. It allows me to be vigilant in all layers at the same time, without sacrificing too much focus in realspace. Their telemetry wasn't calibrated for such ranges.

Patricia heard I was . . . uncannily gifted psyker, but couldn't imagine how much. Even Janna mentioned to her I was "dangerous". So much, sisters had to watch me very closely and put to scrutiny all my display of power. She asked nicely if I wouldn't share knowledge about how far my abilities reached. I told her, perhaps carelessly, that their equipment does not have appropriate apparatus to measure it. Canoness dared me to try, ordering priestess to re calibrate all sensors.

Best I could do outside battle was to shape time-space-nexus around us. Immaterium is ever present and omni present around our physical plane bubble.

I walked to middle of lower deck and looked over faux window, displaying planet down below. With all focus I could muster without proper warm up, I manifested most thick and powerful shield, putting all my attention into its creation.

Momentarily, red alert sounded onboard as floor around me begun to melt. Lightning arcs shoot out to metallic chandeliers. Murky darkness lighted only by holographic displays illuminated with brilliant, phosphorus, blinding, white light. It took only one second to melt through ceiling and two walls, after which I dispelled this shell. Whole ship experienced sudden drop of power, entering backup mode. Massive stone plates melted around my area of influence so much



it still glowed orange bright. Heat in room risen dramatically, but new openings in walls, ceiling and floor, quickly vented it out to just tropical range and replenished partial vacuum. Twisted steel girders melted and fused with stone, now spiking out like stalactites due to discharge arc. Servitors, well . . . stank of burned circuitry and flesh. Most of consoles have popped out in explosion of sparks. Noosphere became totally fried. The only equipment still working was static field display techpriestess' personal terminal. Patricia . . . Instead of coordinating any efforts of incoming rescue teams, run over to priestess to see results of her calculations, while I quietly watched as whole section settled after severe meltdown. It was first time I saw her expression change. Part anger and part disbelief, her eyes opened wide in wince of disgust when priestess scrolled over numbers of her holo display. It was too far for me to see what was on charts. Both of them stood on platform, ignoring calling sisters asking for instructions or explanation. In few seconds, all battle sisters form whole damn ship converged around me. Dagmara patiently put her bolter down, but retributors kept their heavy guns ready.

Patricia glanced at me only once. From high ground, it really looked menacing. Like she would start to shed a tear. From her aura pulsed urge of murder and helplessness. Almost victimhood. I wasn't sure if she was going to give killing order or not. After few deep breaths, her face returned to usual. With sweeping gesture of hand, sisters were ordered to vacate chamber and adjacent rooms, allowing technicians to begin repairs.

Jumping down from main commandery, canoness signaled something around to her celestians, grabbed me by arm and told to leave. They escorted me directly to the bunker. Power was brought online. This time, sisters did not leave me alone. Each one came in, after their commander. Dagmara sealed door, cutting off outside world. Rest of sisters readied their weapons under gate. I sat at desk, expecting worst. And preparing for inexorable case of extreme misunderstanding.

Patricia had trouble finding words through clenched teeth. I already seen this reaction and was sure this time, every high ranking officer in their order went through same training. Or conditioning.

After few attempts, she pointed finger at me, which readied all guns in room, asking quietly to tell her what the in name of White Celestine was I. After seconds of silence, she started to walk towards me. I answered by saying none would believe, no matter what was said, so there is no point in it anyway. Once again, she politely, but firmly, demanded to spill it. There is no knowing if she really bought it, but notion of being perpetual psyker who had 12 millennia of practice seemed to satisfy her. In turn, I asked her how much energy they measured, but she immediately spun it around, curious to know what did I think.

Judging by four plasma generators, my estimation was that it clocked at maximum ceiling, hardcoded into cogitators, somewhat around 100 TEV. My guess wasn't answered. In risen voice, uncommon for her, demanded to know how much more I was hiding. I couldn't stop myself, so . . . perhaps out of vanity, with dose of smug, informed her, my highest score was 2.17 exa electronvolts. It confused her to hear this number. She turned around to celestians like searching for a clue, but there was no response. Sisters menacingly stood under lamps, ready to fire, but beside their visible interest in situation, nobody could help her.

After coming over desk, told me to explain my technical cant. Through partially clenched jaw, trying not to look at her too much, I informed her it was



enough to destroy a cruiser in one shot. Patricia squinted eyes in disbelief. Said she will consult Kitmera, which I assumed was head Magos taking care of ship. Probably the same who monitored me.

I have an idea what went through her head, but I felt quick and thick vortex of energy around her top astral nexus, meaning period of intense thinking, partially obstructed by unwanted thoughts.

Minute passed. Canoness shook her head slightly and returned to issue of our presence at ILU-2, like this whole thing didn't happen. She now walked across room, in grandstand, passing around.

It was obvious to everyone this journey wasn't officially sanctioned deployment from my governor's capacity. I was the governor, but it has become my own personal thing and it would not merit to drag Imperium in my personal cases. She, of course, wanted to know every detail of this excursion, but up to her disdain, not even I had any data to share. Only few scraps of information which could lead me to someone who promised heaven but delivered hell. It sounded to her like personal revenge and to keep it simple, I nodded yes. It visibly calmed her down, stopping this pacing back and forth, returning to usual expression of indifference. Most of all, aura begun to clear congestion.

Playing off that card, I explained how I didn't have exact coordinates, but only that this person hid his black site genetic laboratory, so we would have to search the old way. It made her freeze. For moment, eyes fixated upon me, wide open. In waning voice asked to repeat, so I did. I added it could be a matter of heretek. This had her slightly open mouth but no other reaction followed. She could have been canoness, but nobody can fool their soul. Cold and dense energies enveloped her aura. I asked if Janna had possibly told her about broadcasting center, but there was nothing beside enforced, sad smile. Canoness or not, she still was human at heart. Care for her sisters or perhaps even departed ones, made her break character for few seconds. Taking over the top, self assured posture, said ostentatiously that this knowledge should remain secret and asked sisters to leave, up to their great surprise. Dagmara had many doubts if this "abhuman" was worth of her time, but complied after direct order.

We waited until everyone was out. Patricia pulled with telekinesis stool from under wardrobe seat, put elbows on desk and covered her jaw with hand basket. I wasn't surprised at all, which made her curious, how did I know. Few people know there even was such power like reading auras of living beings. I added some technical detail about how every entity emits electromagnetic sphere of influence around itself, which can be read like vague visions. I noticed her presence in warp when . . . she dared me to show off. It was very well masked, but in brilliance of such light, pulled from higher realms, nothing could hide. It effectively scared off any astral beings in vicinity. At least for some time.

She didn't have time for small talk and told me upfront that this knowledge is very sensitive in order. Officially, she is not a psyker, but discovered those powers in late times. Only Janna and arbiter committee knew about it. And it was supposed to stay like this. Another issue was discovery about exploitation of their order by ecclesiarchy. No one, except for few most high ranking officers, knew how sisterhood has been treated. Asked me did I find anything missing in the order. Was there anything which caught my attention.

Not knowing how to respond to that, I first of all praised how sororitas



have taken care of their beauty aspect, but no. Directed issue towards how ecclesiarchy, usual a commander of Adepta Sororitas was . . . ekhmmmm . . . in tight spot at the time. She swept head sideways, stating their holy purpose of exterminating heretics, no matter who they are or how they appear.

With this stated, there was also matter how their effort brings, perhaps, more civilian casualties than cultist deaths, but this was not the case as well. Patricia seemed to know I had extensive experience with sisterhood and turned my attention to subjects which was absent from their order.

My first thought was inquisitorial oversight, but seemingly not. I tried again with lack of proper communication between commanders, but it only aggravated her. In the end, canoness pointed out their lack of repentia squads. This . . . really seemed odd. It was true, repentia were nowhere to be seen, but I just assumed all were sent to front line without much thinking of it. I had no idea if she was right, partially uninformed or it became a trick question. Apparently, severe embargo on servitors was connected to this.

It made me think. Patricia gave me minute to process and asked again how did it look like to me. Taking into consideration how order conducted itself in everyday life in metropolis, I assumed the reason why there was no repentia squad, would be desire to keep reputation of order in eye of populous higher than it was necessary. Sight of repentia could invoke distrust. According to her, it was only partial truth. What I said was just a corollary of real reason.

Normally, sister overcame with great shame or grief about her inadequacy in certain task or failure would put them into frenzied desire to wash away such deeds and enter service of repentia squad. Usually result of a serious fuckup. Sometimes result of a deep feeling of inequity.

Order of Laurel Crown brought up their sisters differently than usual schola progenium within the Imperium. I have seen it myself at broadcasting array site. . . . No kidding. Because of that, all memories of . . . abuse, have been so compartmentalized and hidden, that any sister recollecting those scenes turn to tantrum and despairing demise. Their training does not matter when flooded by wave of such destructive emotions. There was no repentia because no sister stayed sane enough to join it.

Apparently nobody knew it was happening, until she had one of her own purifier squads turn to almost vegetables, after suicidal attempts. Somewhere one standard year before I arrived, with help of her ship's astropath, uncovered what lied in deep within, but due to unimaginable turmoil in their minds, they have already been infested by warp parasites and nothing of substantial value could be recovered from seven of those sisters. Only dreadful memories of conduct they have been put through, but no concrete data about location. Janna, receiving all information from me, during time of my first visit, decided to keep everything under wraps despite far reaching implications of this process. Her resolve to purge all records of those mistreatment overpowered any obstacles. Then, Ministorum black mass happened. My efforts have been most advantageous to order's oath and valor, which was the reason I still wasn't persecuted for spying or heresy due to my lack of . . . pioussness.

Every sister in order has been closely monitored to make sure they do not search too deep for their flaws, a procedure setup by Synthia almost 20 years before. At first, it ensured no one would suspect a thing from periodical



psychological evaluation every quarter by ecclesiarchy agents. Not until Patricia uncovered procedure setup and investigator's manual, written by heretek scientists, where Synthia has been loosely implicated of treachery. Because of her investigation, half of sororitas were in danger of immediate recollection of those memories and "malfunctioning" in least expected moments, possibly jeopardizing chain of command in worst way possible. Patricia, due to nature of her unit, could perform few attempts of forced recollection which . . . all led to absolute failure and suicides. Their mental locks were not only at mind or physical body, but fettered with warp energies. She was worried, if any of them would even sighted black site and totally recall, cascade of failures would lead to collapse of whole order. She was never able to gather any information against Synthia or anything about this operation, only inciting canoness superior's anger for such serious accusations. Until my discovery of underground laboratories. Such revelation stirred hornet's nest within ecclesiarchy and adding insult to injury with my another discovery at Ministorum, led to internal dispute within command structures. Despite their philosophy of conquering weaknesses, subliminal self destruct mechanism embedded within subconsciousness of her sisters. She wouldn't send anyone on recon since there was no telling who has been . . . processed.

I told her that palace provided Janna with complete list of detainees as well as subjects processed on that site. This was . . . both good and bad idea. Apparently canoness superior said those records were lost. In good faith, I retold story of what happened that day, which turned her stomach upside down. Once her anger cooled down, we talked about Janna's death. She held facade very well, but once again, her aura became spotty. Clumped and hardened in many places. She looked at table in silence, but inside . . . a shame? Almost the same I felt from Lydia on her ship. I had no idea if this was just situation they found themselves in, or conditioning made them react in same way. Either way, the cat was out of bag. Apex of anger passed in few minutes, which we spent in dead silence. After all, she got up and walked out, informing me that there will be Valkyrie retrofitted for recon, ready in hangar bay. Once frigate reached high orbit I would be notified and cleared for departure. For last, she asked to keep knowledge of her abilities for myself.

Waiting for few minutes, making sure nobody would disrupt me, I pulled up sketch of BB and picture of Patricia I made, to compare them side by side. Talk about uncomfortable coincidences. There was no mistake. Adjust size, length of hair and both of them were exact match. Even counted every freckle on her cheeks. Perhaps a confirmation bias, but . . . I finally started to understand why she drew me so much. Magnetically drawn. Too bad she wasn't for taking. Ehrrrrrrrrrr . . .

Cosmic pranksters know how to prank. Perhaps even more deterring is awareness that Reitziger knew it all along. He planned for this. I could not, for love of the Emperor, guess how in the blasted void he could plan so damn ahead. I didn't know how he collected his intel, but all of it sounded too good to be true. Somehow he did know. No matter the precautions I took, he always did and used me to his own end. Trap has been sprung already. It became clear to me that Edmund railroaded our conflict into this state of . . . silliness. Blacklight camped out one planet with such vast forces, almost vacating whole sector. Inquisitor was held back 370 light years away. His Crimson Jokes have been eradicated.



Drukhari chased away. Imperium grew in strength, while chaos cults were purged by what remained of ecclesiarchy. The only missing piece were rampaging Orks. It seemed as they served to hold our greatest attention while something else was happening. And me . . .

At first, I was just a stray. Random nobody who happened to be at wrong place at the wrong time and . . . FUUUUUUUUCK! I thought he adjusted all his plans for me, on the fly. I made insurrection success and substituted his pawn. I drove off his rivals and yet . . . he seemed to me like a big, nay, giant setup. He played all of us. I imagined even mechanicus and inquisition, in way yet to be discovered . . . Not your everyday mad scientist. Not your everyday cultist. Not your everyday renegade commander.

And you know . . . there was already a sign of his . . . power. One thing I missed which hid in plain sight. Something we all missed. Something we all saw. Something so vivid yet invisible to untrained eye. We . . . I -I . . . missed the most obvious part. Never in my dreams I ever suspected that . . . Nah, let's just move on.

A: Yes, what I told you already should be enough to recognize what we really went up against.

A: Especially ordo malleus.

A: Yes. It was that subtle. I even explicitly said it to this recording machine.

A: Haha! That's right. Where was it!

A: No.

A: No.

A: No.

A: No.

A: Nope.

A: No. Now you can at least partially understand how hard was it to see through this charade.

A: Maybe ask Paladins, they should be able to piece it together.

A: No. That's wrong as well. And yes, what I told you already is all I had to see through this bullshit.

A: Maybe. But then, even you couldn't do a thing. I don't like to think we all have been played by him, but there is no denying facts.

4 hours later Sali came in with servitor, to leave pilot suit and clearance slate on table. She left me with instructions about what I can expect from sisters on my way and in the hangar. I geared up as soon as she left. Reaching for helmet, I noticed a prayer book in its own slot in box's bottom. Reminding me what kind of ship it is. Ornamental steel cover, woven with silvery flowers and eagle bosses.



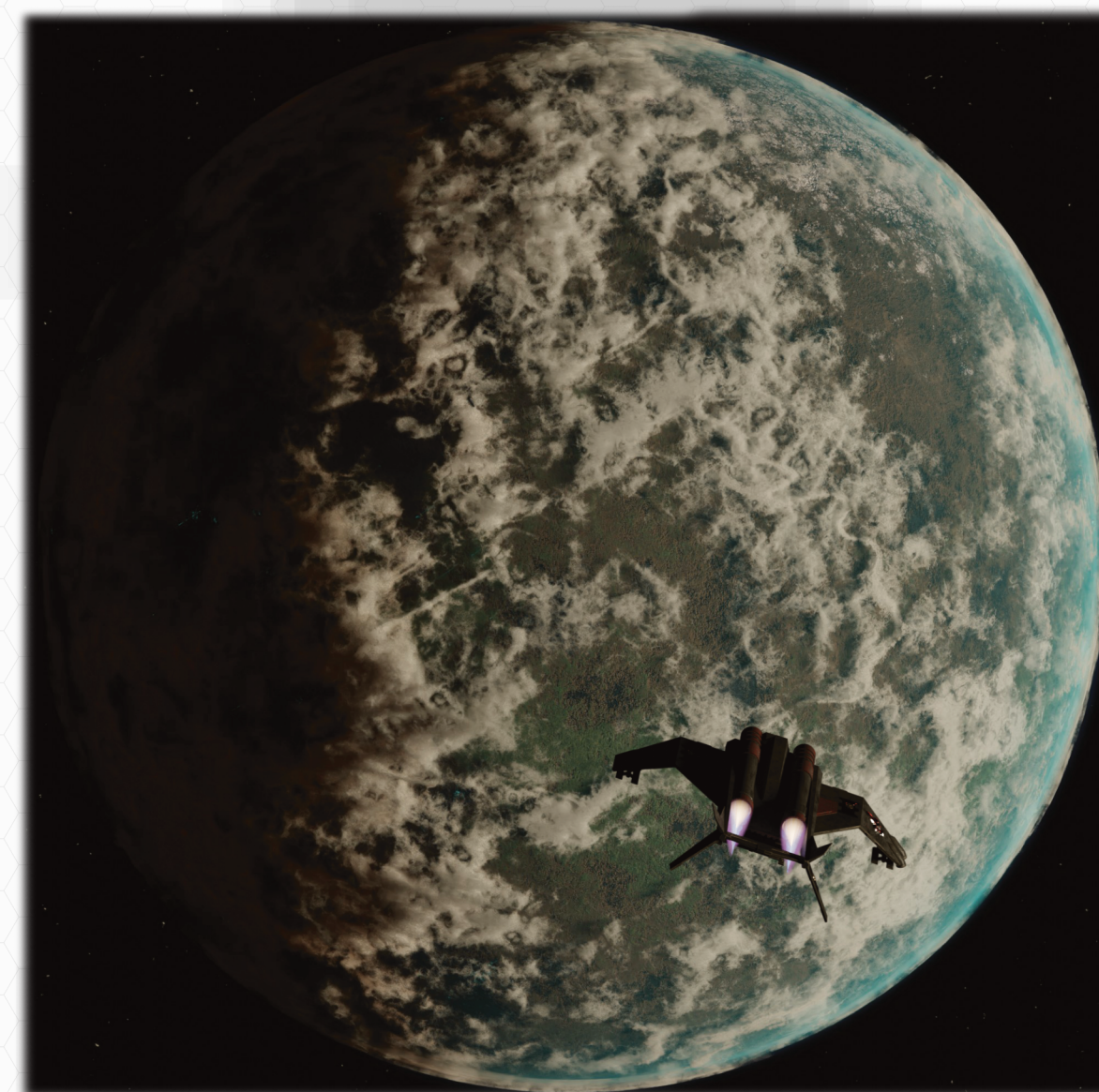
Written in thick, gothic bastara font, adorned in extravagant colorful index letters. Visibly dated. Possibly venerable. Its parchment old and worn. Most of edges roughed. Its color darkened out. Little cloth strip, rugged and bleak. I might have many issues with how Imperium functions, but I always appreciate how scripts an books are made. This one was written for Mara herself. Sacred and holy relic of past put into my hands. Very uncanny privilege for outsider. To lend it to me, even after I haven't shown much interest in prayers, remained me that no matter where I was, there was still responsibility for people. I might not like praying to Emperor but for sake of my people, yeah . . . my people. . . sometimes you just gotta do what you gotta do. I brought it with myself, holding in hand all the way through ship. Four sisters, guarding me outside, attempted snarky commentary about my less than stellar conduct, but this time, seeing what swung in my hand, stopped mid sentence. For once, they dropped hostility.

Valkyrie I was supposed to fly, was loaded with augur and scanning equipment. Ground penetrating radar, spectroscope, communicator cipher unit, and optical laser surface scanning array. Because of its weight, all weapons have been removed. It was now really just a recon craft. For my copilot, sisters designated servitor. How nice . . . I preferred Leonida every day of the week over any servitor.

Before we could fly however, there was mandatory singing segment, because of course. For propitious effort of my mission, three songs, of valor, of duty and of light. Being enclosed in cockpit I didn't really have to, but . . . I already had prayer book with me so why not try. Just looking at beautiful writing brought me a smile.

Once we came to last page of Song Of Light, finally whole purpose of this became clear. Small note form Patricia. I kinda started to like those methods. Flimsy piece of thin paper held frequency, channel and authorization code for onboard radio signed with sentence "contact me first shall you find anything". One thing I couldn't negate was lack of boredom since arriving at Mara.

First planet wasn't that big and dead rock anyway. With radius barely reaching 2100 Km, I spent 6 hours flying over planetoid few times, but sensors picked nothing. Even if scanning array had 2 kilometer underground penetration and radius of almost 1000 kilometers. Upon refueling, techpriestes downloaded data to add all to available database. From snippids I heard by eavesdropping, it seemed like ILU-2-3 was abundant in high stress metals like titanium and wolfram but nothing major. We attempted two more flights but found nothing more. Canoness decided not to waste any more time and move to another planet. Just about when my sleepy time came close.





— Arrival Day [137] — Pursuit day [123] — Day of reign [91_] —

Announcement about arrival over high orbit of ILU-2-2 woke me up. It's been good six hour sleep. Sali on comms asked me to prepare for another flight. Quick meal, another prayer in hangar and off I go again.

Mostly tundra world with patches of seas just in good proximity and orbit to sun. Clear weather, breathable atmosphere and floating parts of ships. Too low in orbit and too small to detect it with ship's augur sensor, but onboard array picked it in close proximity. I changed my vector to intercept it. In accordance to little note, had to gaslight control center, saying I had a feeling to start somewhere else. Patricia helped me out, acknowledging it was "my sortie" and my personal endeavor.

Purposefully slowed down near debris to have bit more time amid rubble when I reach it. Twenty additional minutes later cameras could finally see wreckage. Honestly, I imagined lots of small parts floating dozens of miles apart, yet I found a destroyed civilian shuttle largely in one piece. Something 10 times Valkyrie size come up on radar. I punched in message describing what I found in secure channel and waited ten minutes for answer. Servitor reminded me sensor range was shorter than my current orbit altitude, forcing me to shut down those commadns. Few minutes later servitor chanted series of binary code and read message instructing to investigate.

Using opportunity of star rising behind planet, I communicated to tower I will be taking a brief EVA walk to take in the views, but resounding negative filled vox, because it was supposed to be a recon, not a vacation. I asked for permission from canoness on open channel and started to depressurize cockpit. Seal gauge connected to safety seal turned green and hatch readied for opening. Servitor issued alarm, but everything seemed fine. I brought Valkyrie closer to wreckage. Except for oxygen, I had little use for glider pack, but it was more fun that way.

Parked Valkyrie hundred meters away. White, slender, and winged shuttle was visibly former possession of a noble. Shiny, snowy panels and gold flowers glittered in coming rays. But one could see scorched tail of hull from far away.

Bodies floating inside, visible through windows. I ripped out exit hatch and immediately glitter dust flew outside. Heavy side panels of transport, covered with cream fabric, looked like metallic lacquer, shining like ice from thousands little angles. Purple and gold cushions covered with layer of ice. Spilled champagne bottles drifted around. Food, whatever dishes those were, preserved in void, mostly smeared on faces of corpses. Further in back, one could see melted and scorched steel grids, partially evaporated seats and half fried people. My best guess would be electric arc strong enough to melt windows and burn all electronics onboard. But what could it be had to be investigated closer. I took pictures of all people inside to send it to canoness. Due to busted hydraulics, pilot compartment required use of strength as well. One pilot shot himself with pistol, while other clearly waited till the end, suffocating with oxygen mask in hand. No power and no means to check data repository. I returned and sent everything to Patricia, while searching in my own PDA any mention of this shuttle. Servitor was still fine, so we continued mission. It took 2 hours to find first signal.

Flying over equatorial mountain ridge, sensors spot large, unnatural



flattening over slopes. Thanks to Valkyries speed, it took mere hour to find it. Closer I came, clearer compound became. Scanning array became clear 18 miles outside, allowing to see how big this was. At least Imperium's sensor arrays are produced to standard. One of those things which is worthy to salvage from any ship.

Mountain chain on plateau, stretching for hundreds of miles was quite the sight. Some kind of base of operation has been built on top of ridge. Valley down the slope was filled with dense forest. Few patches of grass and shrubs on its climb up. There was some kind of short radio tower on peak, built on top of sentry tower. Both seen better days. What was most noticeable however, was the leveled out part of mountain, which served as landing strip.

Landing pad was big enough for interstellar transport. Maybe half mile in diameter. Southern part of summit was visibly torn down, leaving northern half relatively usable. Surrounded by other peaks and valleys, provided nice hiding place with awesome view. It also transmitted some kind of static. Very faint white noise on all frequencies. It reminded me to alert canoness first. Having no idea if she received my transmission, I doubled it. I could no longer contact ship as well.

Clearly thinking human would turn around and report, but I was too excited to wait. Landed Valkyrie on bottom of valley and begun hiking. Seeing what state landing zone was in, I decided better not to risk potential cave in.

It took me 40 minutes to climb up to top of the platform. Mountain summit has been cut in half. Terraces of lower levels hung over mountain tall precipice. Rockcrete landing area was very old. In fact 2 millennia old. Most of it's surroundings resembled chipped rock and ruins with visible traits of erosion. Only few patches of surface seemed redone not so long ago, with visible steel plate reinforcements, probably for landing gear of freighters. Main walkway looked like new. Two wheeled cargo haulers parked under main gate entrance, but severely rusted. Chips and cracks in rockcrete spanned out on every surface of this compound. Few structures looking like control booths and radio tower filled with holes. Most of their substance gone long ago. Small trenches around zone's perimeter filled with bogs of swamp and whatever passed for plant life on such altitude. Few critters hiding in.

Redone facade of entry into mountain bunker did not instill optimism. Honestly, I had no idea what to expect. It all clearly looked inhabited, even refreshed few years back, but knowing Reitziger, surprises would mount up exponentially.

Before going further, it was in order to take better look with binoculars or at least close up with drone, but I found it missing from my appurtenances. Things were left behind in Valkyrie. Thought of going back to vehicle almost knocked me prone, but going in without pistol or even knife wasn't too smart. I assumed enemy already knew I was coming and prepared accordingly. Giving them more time wasn't going to change anything. Perhaps instill a bit of doubt.

Fortunately, road down was easy. Just jumped down the slope and saved myself half hour trodd. Few minutes of jogging back to craft and it was all good. But then, sitting in cockpit compelled me to let Patricia know what was up there, so I reparked it 4 kilometers south into the valley and sent message. She confirmed and acknowledged, further announcing on open channel that we have found enemy base of operations and initiated defcon 4. Wished me luck.



Valkyrie stayed far out, running low on fuel. I loaded backpack with infiltration equipment, belted my pistol and sword. To save time, I used some of my powers to fly over valley. It is somewhat exhaustive, even for me, especially weighted down. It might have only taken 13 minutes to get back, but I had to rest before doing anything.

A: As impressive it sounds, it takes knowledge about how gravity well is formed over astral plane. It's a point of concentrated energy which attracts more energy. One. . .

A: I don't, because it's useless to waste energy on flying instead on shield.

A: Simple floating is easy. Maneuvering amid chaotic battle takes too damn much concentration AND depletes psychic pool much faster, being very taxing. Fast and large jumps or lurches do similar job without expending all this power.

This time drone gave me accurate picture of whole pad. Rectangular, half by quarter mile in size, clearly made as military outpost. Catwalks outside supporting wall, half gone. Every patrol routes and compound roads seized by vegetation. No visible sentries or defense hole opening in bunker wall. Two cargo haulers rotten beyond use. No hostile life forms detected outside. I concentrated on searching any life signs behind blast doors, searching deeper into summit, but neither nor my senses did not register anything .

Since there was nothing more to see, it came to issue of opening gate. At first, I didn't notice side panel in side frame of blast doors and searched all over wall. I doubted rock cliff had anything but I kept looking. Only when trying to rip it open, green light lit numerical display. It required passcode to disengage lock, so it didn't get me any closer. No amount of inputs helped. Nothing matched desired combination. There was only one solution left. As always.

First I ripped out vertical bars from floor and ceiling locks, then gently pushed wings aside. Unfortunately some kind of mechanism blocked gate rollers, forcing . . . more force. Road inside remained curiously pristine and not longer than dozen meters. Big lift built in segmented rockcrete shaft has seen better days, but floor panelings of platform looked almost brand new. 4 wheel haulers but only few containers stacked in platform. Steel girders anchored in rock shaft looked heavy and trustworthy to hold such big mass.

Control booth was locked, but it wasn't a problem. It's the lack of power. Before going down, I had to find how to light it up. Fortunately, control console had appropriate switches. When booted it up, holograph displayed to me date of M39.025. Not working like it should, lagging with simple button input every time, but still worked. Vox announcer was busted and constantly hummed with noise. Not something I wanted to hear during infiltration so I just . . . ripped it out. Sound of vox array hitting metal plates echoed in whole mountain. It wasn't infiltration attempt anyway.

Few minutes later, when I finally found command to descend, all gates closed, side bars rose up, orange siren lights started to shine, and giant gears finally rolled lift downwards. I left backpack upstairs to provide radio and homology reference. At first, it stopped 4 condignations lower, but then,



vertical shaft turned into slope.

Lift stopped at bottom station. I saw orange lights, maybe hundred meters away, opening into massive underground cave. Arrival platform and everything inside was pitch black and gravely quiet. Perhaps a shipping level. Main road cleared of any obstacles, but all kinds of containers cramped big caverns on both sides. Haulers parked under security bunker. I couldn't see much due to big columns, but it seemed like here was some kind of storage facility. I tried opening some doors, but everything was empty. Catwalks spanned from column to column, over all length of main road. Curiously well maintained. Behind storage, area another sealed gate. Maybe 5 meters tall. Star shaped vault door, partially built into ground.

I found control mechanism in security bunker next to it, but without power. I let drone fly in search of power source while I perused all schematics still laying around, but no luck. Aside from few scraps of paper containing orders for evacuation few weeks before, nothing. Even garbage bin has been emptied. Drone came back with no luck as well.

Again, the only thing left to do was to rip out vault gate. Those however, weren't some ordinary entrance blast doors. Before attempting opening, I had to be sure there were not rigged to blow or set off charges collapsing mountain on me. While drone sniffed for traces of connections or demolition packs, I took better look at entry wall. Carved in graphite stone, just below 300 meter of rock. Its portal built upon like of cave entrance. Except for visible frame and few feet of rockcrete, it was all made out of pure, raw adamantium. Its shimmering crystals veins glittering in gray thousandfold cut glitterdust. I set drone to search for rock composition. In fifteen minutes, I had geologic report of entrance and storage area. No telling if this was adequate for whole mountain, but 93 % of all natural rock was raw adamantium. Not just a vein on asteroid. Not a mine, ten miles underground, but whole damn mountain. I just had to test myself against this rock if it was really adamantium. I know how hard is to mine adamant and sure know just how tough is mere pebble of this stuff, but you know . . . it's kind of a . . . challenge.

I found few boulders to practice punches and it really was tough. Not as hard as adamantium alloy, but raw power of its ore is still incredible. Punching through its wall was out of question if I ever wanted to remain in strength afterwards. It would entirely exhaust me. Hoped doors were made of less sturdy material, but no . . . it was ceramite core with adamantium reinforcement.

I waited until drone finished scanning for traps and stepped out of booth to prepare. Moment of meditation to still thoughts and help energies to flow. I catch doors in psychic grip, trying to pull gate against it's nature and gently struggle, when all lights come up, security sirens swirl around in deafening echo of alarm. I let go of gate and its mass to hide inside security bunker again. Few mechanism growl behind door, yanking and screeching. I hear twirling and high pitch noise, loud, ear piercing scratching of metal surface. Maybe a minute later gate recessed into opening during long moments of steely torment. Then, I hear it is rolled sideways. I saw, from behind control console, how two buttons begun to shine under bridge label. Contract and retract. One of them lighted up on its own. Nothing more left than to push it. Sounds of big, steel platform fragment connected to main road, filling silence with growls of heavy equipment for a while.



And just like that, everything went quiet. Rotating alarm lights stopped. Only light fixtures over main road remained turned on. I stayed hidden in darkness of bunker, waiting for anything to happen for 30 minutes. When nothing came out or in during that period, obviously nothing would. Before entering further, drone made a recon flight to check inside. Hiding around corner, behind recess in stone portal, I took remote control. Star shaped shaft dragged for over 10 meters. Camera showed well lit storage area filled with shipping containers stacked in dozens up high, in hundreds of rows, broken into segments by gigantic colonnade.

I took a look at entrance to see how rail ramp connected entrance with base ground. Mobile arm, extending from ceiling machinery, dragged out five segments of what looked like gate pieces and laid each one next to entrance on stone platform and then . . . my drone lost signal. I heard frantic yell of damned soul for help in vox caster of controlling device, saturated with static and noise, so loud, it deafen me for moment, leaving ringing in ears. Seconds later, heavy drop of drone echoed between stones. I had my suspicions what happened, but due to nature of my enemy, I couldn't take anything for granted. Quick change of gear and quick assault through entrance.

Extended steel platform firmly locked itself in opening of road as well as two star cavities in the opening. Big enough to let transporters with cargo in. Few meters behind entrance ramp sloped down to great cavern. On left, storage area, on right, something like service for small vehicles, facility cut our in solid bedrock and three big doors. Two were open, third one closed. Stepping carefully wasn't much of my concern. Focus on possible enemies was.

My radio started to pick up static on all channels. Even my PDA lost signal to Valkyrie. The closer I walked towards buildings, the more words started to flow through radio. At first they did not seem like words, just choppy syllables, but when I neared to first open gate, words became clearer, but still choppy and full of static. Someone talked, but I couldn't figure out what or in which language.

In middle of staging area, between two big trucks, laid circle of copper plates. Within this circle stood table with two candelabras. Between them, two envelopes. If I ever had any doubt it was a setup, no more after that.

My first reaction was to run, knowing I shouldn't be here. At least not alone, but . . . but morbid curiosity won over me.

Making sure its not electrified or rigged, I crossed perimeter which efficiently cut off static from radio. Words became clear and crystal. Someone performed some kind of ritual. Few praying voices, choir, music, chimes ... but I still didn't understand meaning of words. Coming closer, I noticed two thick copper wires connecting candle stands with circle, and two weight plates under envelopes. One was signed "how to win", second "secrets of my work". Somebody engraved on the table "Choose only one. And don't cheat". I was sure he watched. After all . . . he lured me in with so much trouble.

I thought about how to trick the trickster. If Edmund setup elaborate plan like this just to play with me, there sure was no way he overlooked extension of my power. I run around compound searching for clues. Looking into opened doors brought nothing. Both had another sealed gate. Control panels on walls have been removed. Any personnel entrance door was sealed with thick welds. No way of knowing it, but I suppose he didn't suspect I would come alone. Whole area was



cut off.

Making sure there was no other way took me around 40 minutes. Plenty of time to think which option to take. In the end I used telekinesis to pick up both of them at the same time, which led to short circuit over copper plate circle. Both gates started to close. Those always could be ripped out if need be.

For starters, I chose envelope with his secrets. It doesn't take farseer to infer it was on my mind. Inside, combination of twelve digits written on small piece of candy wrap.

Second one was bit more menacing. It was darker. Like charcoal. Its parchment very old and delicate. It partially broke as soon I grabbed it with fingers. Like made from ashes. Inside was big piece of paper. On its top, perfectly hand written in red, phosphorous ink "I knew you would cheat". Under it, onomatopoeic laughter filled whole page. You have no idea how angry it made me. I smacked truck next to me hard enough to send it flying into towering stacks of containers, destroying most of its structure on impact. Quake filled cave with echo. Force of psionic wave displaced copper circle and table. And dust due to toppling containers.

I calmed down fast, reminding myself that nothing is ever so easy. Took another look at page searching for answers, but the only additional sentence was on the back - "I knew because we are both the same" . . . what an asshole . . .

Holding onto candy wrap, I started to search for place to input combination. Entrance gate didn't let me. I tried to search in database for anything like that, but nothing there. No radio contact at such frequencies as well. In the end, I employed undoubtedly most effective tool in my arsenal and ripped out middle gates from hinges.

As it turned out, every gate led to the same cargo terminal. They were just multiple decontamination chambers for freight transfer. Two rail platforms at station. One had two cargo wagons ready for departure, but no containers on them. Behind rail conjunction, further away, giant glass wall separated what seemed like gargantuan abyss, but very well lit. Even where I stood, its vivid light cast stronger shadows than light fixtures. Rails had complementary walkways, upon which smaller, wheeled container engines could drive.

I came closer to window, watching for any sign of life force around me, but what I felt was aaaaaaaa . . . very faint spark of . . . I can't call it a life force, but living things. Almost plant like recognition of simple organisms. And dose of . . . "darkness". Something disturbing down below.

As soon as I jumped down from platform on rail, familiar voice laughed out loud from vox casting system. Hhhhhhhhhhyyyyyyy . . . I knew it was a trap all along, so at least it didn't surprise me. Just sudden break of silence startled me.

As I came close to giant glass wall, its separator colonnade became more visible. I noticed foreign architecture. Something like at Bunker Hill, certainly not Eldrich but certainly xeno work. Tall and . . . eee . . . massive, but still slender. Somewhat crude, but masonry cut pristinely up to milimeter. Whole facility carved out from the same adamantium soaked rock. Some parts of it were rough, but finished surfaces were finished to the polish. Reminding somewhat of squat design.

Shining spectacle of adamantine crystals in walls taken into account when planning out its effective glamour. Lightning on walls formed lengthy bars in



between wall columns.

Reitziger expressed his disappointment in my lack of drama, after laughing his lungs out. Apparently I cheated out his riddle, but he knew all along what I would do. He even admitted candy wrap held made up combination anyway. Few steps later, gazing at gargantuan cavern filled with industrial buildings, he welcomed me into his humble abode, speaking of riches and wonders a brave hero could find there, in den of evil dragon. He certainly liked old, Terran fables.

Station crossroads was highest point of whole cavern. Looking down almost instilled fear of heights in me. Massively big. A mile down? Perhaps half a mile. Either way, tall and very wide. I saw multiple buildings below, perfectly illuminated by electromagnetic light system. Rails swirled around cave, in carved out tunnels. Few trains on lower station. Few big buildings and many small ones. Most of the reminded manufacturing plants. Two structures looking like office spires. One giant column supporting ceiling in middle of whole cave looked like living hubs.

He invited me down into city, to witness some of his creations. Advised to take rail cart instead of walking, but I didn't listen to his advice. In one swing, my fist, filled with psychic blast, shattered window partition into cavern depths. I waited to see where its pieces landed to determine if it was a good place and jumped down. Truth be told, I didn't think it trough. When nearing floor, sudden catch of anxiety made me suspect I overdid it. Indeed, a hard landing. Augmented landing shattered rockcrete slabs. And broke two fingers on left hand. Rock splinters were effectively loose blades. Broken pieces of adamantium resemble razors. Because of my hasty decision, whole mountain filled with echo. Small tremor coarsen through hall. Edmund liked my unorthodox way of not giving a damn about safety, appreciating my "mindlessness". I didn't know if he tried to insult me, praise or deceive.

Few next minutes of walking, finding my way around, allowed him to talk without end, explaining every visited corner. He probably saw my indecisiveness and invited to the facility A1, located on higher level. All buildings at bottom of the cave were just production facilities while my interest allegedly lied in laboratories located in rail tunnels spiraling along cave. His laughter was more discouraging then my missed attempt of a shortcut.

Before cutting out, Reitziger gave me clues where to search for it and assured even I cannot miss it. So I begun to search. Had to go up two levels, somewhere in the middle. There lied another train station in perfect illumination. One, big, seal gate, but opened already. All equipment neatly parked and stashed on the side. Information monitor over gate displayed "over here". I took a look at it to see if it had any inscriptions. Round plate on its front designated "Zone A - C". Before entering, I took last good look at tunnel and supporting columns to check if anything was rigged, then booted up radio to hear crackling and static for reference. In welter of noise, I could hear human speech and distinct words but not clear enough to piece choppy reception together. Before entering, I made sure to destroy closing mechanism of doors.

Short corridor inside led to some kind of plaza. This section was visibly of Imperial architecture. Tall, vaulted, rockcrete ceilings, dozens of lights, metal side panels, stone tiles on the floor. Few containers along the way, but majorly spacious. Few tall windows near security booth and three gates on three walls, each one big enough for shipment truck, signed A, B and C. Since he wanted me to



visit A1, which brought specific memories rushing to me, I went to visit C sector instead. Gate was closed but not locked, I could just open its wings by pulling. Lengthy tunnel led me to what looked like clone hatchery hub.

Vat chambers lined up in rows of dozens in 4 lines. Watching out not to trip over catwalks filled with cables and toolkit carts, I trespassed into its main area. Each chamber had few of such around it. Some tools thrown like garbage on ground. Room was lighted only by whatever illuminated chambers. Not much. Machinery built on ceiling was completely in dark. Some pipes and cables gleaming in soft light. Greenish liquid obscured what was inside, but clarified with close proximity and . . . suspended by welter of tubes floated . . . what looked like result of his "magical specimen".

Taking a look at those . . . clones, gave me chills. All looked like ready for . . . purchase. They didn't have particular looks, made with variety of . . . options to choose from. As formidable was their physical looks, all were dead. Never alive in first place. As pleasant to the eye it could be, for one's soul it was really demotivating. One thing in common however, was their state of decay. Clearly someone did not take care of them. I saw biological silt gathering on the bottom of chambers. Their bodies atrophied. Normally clear liquid turned little green, illuminating suspense. Breathing apparatus turned off. Right now, it was just hunk of sludgy meat resembling feminine shape. On the very end, four vertical pods held four original templates of Eldar women With clear lines of incision in their bodies in many places. Looked somewhat . . . put together from different parts, with visible skin lines, still not treated with merging. Those were only ones still "living", if such term could be used. Taking closer look at them, struck me back to the day we met with Janna. One of them looked just like Leonida. Rest reminded of her celestial sisters. Going back to entrance, I now could distinguish facial and bodily features of each clone and trace them to original template. It was disgusting to know what it entailed, but . . . oh so real and Imperium like.

Once I decided to walk out, he spoke again, vaunting about creation of all those "wonders", all by himself, despite von Rosette's idiocy. But now, it mattered not anymore, as he has finally attained his goal. In his words; "684 years of planning". It cast suspicion on his existence. My first reaction was that he himself had to be somewhat perpetual being. It even could explain how he managed to live long enough to embark on pilgrimage to Macragge. It made me think he had some kind of connection to me. At that time it didn't occur to me, but . . . you know what happened 7 centuries ago at certain place, which all inquisition denies ever happened in the first place . . . Right . . . Well . . . as people say, world is a small place . . .

I tried to go into B section, but it was closed. Reitziger asked me to wait for final revelation and head for zone A. For once . . . I did. He asked really nice not to waste my time with more dropouts.

Another lengthy tunnel led me to another cloning hub. This one was very well lit. from machinery under walkways, to extractor devices on the ceiling. 4 rows of chambers, 2 paths. This time all specimens . . . were clones of A1 in different stages of . . . growth? No, more like . . . aaaaaaaa . . . Already grown but with different extension of feminine features. But that was not weird. I assumed as much by first time, when assaulting his Bunker Hill, that he had to put a lot of work into such specimen. Worst of all, each and every one had carved into their belly some kind of dark sigil, already scar healed. Each pod with its own number



on plaque attached to monitoring device in front of it. I took a look at first row from entrance. Number went to as high as 897. At the same moment, vox casting system sounded with echo inside hub with Reitziger's laughter. Apparently not every clone was suitable for release and had to be disposed of. During his usual banter, asked me if I knew that clones received lifespan based of their period of gestation. He could make clone grow in mere two weeks, but that would cut short its lifespan by 99%. He found that 6 month grown time was optimum of any grown specimen, including Eldar.

While he tried to explain to me process of clone creation, I took stroll to the beginning of all isles, to the pod of "original one". He built a separate segment just for that purpose, looking like a bed room, which signified it must have been a very important one. Adorned with gold, wood panelings in its compartment, marble tiles on the floor. A table with cogitator and remote console. Book shelf with old books, behind stained glass. Lavish red sofa on the opposite side with golden statue of eagle. Gold chandeliers and scones. It almost looked like library. Except for missing entry wall, exposing true nature of its creation. The pod itself was empty. I imagined Ada, the original one, who now walked free, was created here.

Whatever monitored me, he knew I was interested in its history when I poked around place, so he indulged me a bit, explaining how he tried to perfect specimen A1 throughout last 20 years, but could never bested the original one. Each another one, perhaps the most wonderful, luscious and perfect doll, but they all lacked the divine spark of life. He was curious if I even want to know how was he able to do it in the first place. But only his laughter filled broadcasting system. Time has come for "final encounter". I headed back to section B.

Before entering, he asked me to be patient while he dislodges lock, but I smashed both wings into walls, almost assimilating them into rockcrete. Edmund expressed disappointment again, but I didn't care about such minorities. After lengthy tunnel, another cloning hub, but this one was different. Dark. Barely lit. Rough. carved out of bedrock, large cavern containing vat chambers aligned in circle around central chasm emanating with glowing, azure mist. Ceiling of cave tall and full of jagged spikes. Pipes and thick cables joined into one beam under walkway, encircling pods around. In this chasm, which I found to be just few meters deep, plasma generator glowed outward via Cherenkov radiation. Its light complimented by few floodlights, just enough to make sure nobody would trip over their own legs or holes in the catwalk grid.

Further into cave, on its opposite wall, another entrance to somewhere. Before proceeding further, I took a look at the girls inside pods. Those . . . were clones of what I assumed was BB. Each designated "B2" with number. Highest scored 304, but there were perhaps only few dozens of them. Each specimen, as you can imagine, resembled Black Betty, the one I saw on picture Reitziger sent me. However, unlike template A, template B varied in sizes and some features. Some shorter, some less aaaaaaaa . . . expressive? Of meager bodies, some . . . well, some were too big for my taste. Only few resembled perfect pitch of most luscious woman I could ever even imagine. Perhaps anyone could imagine. It was like seeing the golden fractal ratio embedded into physical form. Visage of beauty not even tales or erotic pictures could capture. And, of course, each one with engraved sigil on their bellies, regardless of height, each icon was in size of, more or less, my hand.

Once I turned away, Reitziger invited me to step into den of all evil, behind



last, central doors to see for myself horrors of flesh creations. I suspected this was the ting I came to see. The real Black Betty. The original. And then I understood where my anxiety came from. The close I got, the more repugnant this feeling of rot became.

Those doors weren't anything special. In fact, it was just standard, side sliding gate, like any imperial doors, lighted by rows of little lights. Inside, however . . . madafaqa . . . was Haemunculi laboratory. Rows of bodies hung upon ceiling hooks. Tables with body parts. Central altar of binding. Cages, now empty. Torture chairs, torture tables, eldrich devices, and blood . . . stench of blood and rotten meat. Even though filters in helmet manged to stop physical stench, the energetic residue directly impacted my astral senses. Floor was all covered with gore and blood. Walls filled with cut specimens. Tall bookcases filled with tomes. Parts preserved in jars, hung over anatomic bars filled with dissected beings. Humans, Eldar and other xenos I didn't recognize. In the back, behind cages, soul extractor devices.

I moved closer towards main spot of whole "laboratory" to take closer look upon signs written in Eldar lexicon over ground circle. Spirit stones cut into rectangular tiles, laid out into circle around main table. Unholy sigils of dark entities from beyond, carved into basin of altar. I knew some of those symbols from picture Kaifas showed me. Clearly taken care of. Filth might have rotten outside circle, but inside was pristine clean. Taking first step inside, I felt a quake. Sharp and quick. That curled hair on my head. I certainly didn't want to be buried. Small vox box situated upon biomechanincal surgery table burst out in laugh. Magician promised me it was nothing to fear, just a normal tectonic quake and encouraged me to search further.

I tried to inspect whole altar but it reminded me of nothing. Moment later, I went to inspect tables where . . . dissection took place. Rows of shelves with neatly grouped parts of heads, arms, legs, torsos, some more butchered than others, all preserved in freezing field of eldrich technology. Some mechanical. Amid those hung peculiar part, a faceplate identical to Kitlana's. Reitziger broke dead silence again, commenting that "she fulfilled her duty. And knew too much". If I only hadn't fell for her inquisitorial trickery . . . I went to search around big husk on the table, at biomechanical part. Torso sawn from many parts of many other bodies. One leg half mechanical, reminding big, lizard creature. Other fully mechanical. Head was missing. I assumed that whatever lied on side table in grasp of mechanical instruments and welter of cables was the thing. At the same time, I finally felt a life inside mountain. Due to distractions of laboratory, my focus shifted away from security. My head immediately turned to the door. Reitziger laughed out loud yet again. Doors locked, but I just punched through them anyway. In vox system I could hear increasing resonance. My PDA picked up new wave channel. What before seemed like ritual . . . turned into black mass. Someone read verses of unholy vespers, glorifying Slaanesh. In the background, screams of sacrificed people.

Edmund told me that he has won. He did so without us ever realizing it. Said that the one closing on me was the one and true BB, but . . . she has become useless to him. Her time was over and I could do with her anything I wanted. That is when another quake struck. I did not waste time and run to the exit. And there was another tremor.

Reitziger laughed all the way. He said, as his . . . "last gift", that to stop



wheels of fate he put in motion, I needed to study the most unholy and blasphemous tablet of destiny, ever to exist in our time-space nexus we call galaxy. Asked to say “hi” to von Rosette when his head would roll. Before I reached top rail station, his laughter was cut off by static and noise. After moment. Even that faded.

Thumps and quakes shook cave and somewhat slowed me. When finally reaching top level, I felt this someone in transitory chambers. I just run out of rail tunnel . . . and all has become clear to me. At the front of ripped gate, waiting on loading platform, stood Black Betty. Or at least what we called her.

Luscious, marvelous, lustful . . . and dreadful, just as beautiful, no, even more than at sketch, emanating with aura of glamour. Presence of a starchild. Indeed a divine feminine of unparalleled attraction. Death magnetic attraction. Even that succubi armor couldn't get more expressive. And exposing. Looked like she just left the arena. Ceremonial blade, blood glowing edge of Drukhari dagger in right hand. Bladed whip in left. Matron of wych cult. Samsara of Negethium. Her most unblemished visage matched only by her martial skills. Even her voice was something to beckon. Soothing. Captivating. Alluring. Hearty. Welcoming. Inviting. No everyday Eldar female could have such tonne to her whispering voice. Maddening. Overtaking. Impossible to refuse. She greeted me with most pleasant voice . . . “Fair welcomes, morning star”.

A: No, I don't.

A: In eldar culture, especially in Drukhari, morning star is one who rises above sea of darkness to break off from bondage of she who thirsts.

A: Something like that. Essentially one on Eldar kind to regain sovereignty over their soul.

You know how it is with Eldar language, words are only part of communication. Hmph. I tried to talk to her. I know how dumb it is to . . . persuade a succubus, but her divine charm worked at me at least in part. And you know . . . This warp presence really does get influential with Slaanesh powers.

Who never seen Drukhari Succubus up close, never knew fiery desire. Even with all my guards up, she slipped something into my head. My astral body became disarrayed, waning. I could not focus properly. It didn't help she was most senior matron of her arena. Her crystalline voice alone echoed in my head. I, myself never met more manipulative bitches than Drukhari wyches. And that's generous. What's worse, all my attempts at rejecting her were . . . too weak. Something was helping her from beyond. She jumped to me in one hoop, landed softly before me and . . . proudly presented herself to me. Light from cavern lighted her fair body in almost godlike manner. Thick veil of black hair shimmered like water in glow of all lights.

None of words in my head seemed to connect to my mouth. I tried to speak but became dumbfounded, stupefied, somewhat numb. I knew it was not my usual self, but something beside her worked around there for sure, otherwise my other-self would not hiss in laughter all this time. Every time I tried to concentrate to follow this . . . string, she waved herself in front of me, speaking and distracting



me. I tried to take few steps back, but then . . . she put hand on my cheek and “hushed” me, laying finger on my lips. Via astral sight, what was left of her soul looked like gray clumps of tar. I could even spot few dark cuts in them. The very opening through which Slaanesh hooked on her.

She toyed with me, bringing me closer and closer to the edge right into opening of window I shattered. My feet seemed to move on their own. In amusement and excitement, she led me to the end, with finger on my mouth. Once I was close enough, she pushed me over in burst of amused laugh.

I guess one thing they didn't expect, is that I would survive. Sure, I wasn't able to fully use strength of my mind to fully dampen impact, but the greater distance to her, the more clarity returned, allowing me to use force cushion during slam. When rising from rock rubble as fast I could, sounds of her wailing scream filled cavern. Despite trauma my body suffered, it really sobered me up, helping me to grasp situation. Unfortunately, despite toughness of my body, some of bones really cracked and I had to resocket left shoulder. Pain of broken bones was actually a good sign. It helped me to concentrate. Whatever presence tried to overtake me, had to do subdue pain first. Last time such thing happened was almost 700 years ago. A lot of time to forget fragility of life.

Thanks to my powers, I can still animate unusable limbs, making them sort of functioning, but of course, every time paid in pain. If not for my sturdy structure, this would effectively immobilize me and . . . probably bury forever.

It wasn't few seconds later, when she already run down through whole tunnel to slash her dagger at me. My reflexes dulled down, giving her free blood. Fortunately, she was too weak to cut through necrodermis gauntlets, leaving just a slight cut on elbow.

She jumped around in uncanny reflexes when I tried to hit her with eldrich blasts, bolts, fireballs, and I even tried summoning lightning chain, but she dodged everything. In turn, she was able to cut me with blade whip ever so slightly, but so many times, visibly playing with me. That other thing, subduing me on astral plane, sure didn't help.

Hiding in buildings, searching for enclosed areas, railing her into narrow cones . . . nothing worked. Despite this situation, I wasn't afraid of dying. I could not die. I . . . I . . . I just couldn't bring myself to hurt her. Part of me still hoped to talk her out of it, connect to her, conquer her . . . consort her. Or maybe it was that something from beyond holding me back. Even when I had her in sight, there was . . . uncertainty if I wanted to do it. Since she was very quick and my body sluggish, I could not lock onto her in order to just grab with psychic grip.

Due to already high internal damage and looming psychic backlash, my body grew weaker and weaker. Our fight could lasted few minutes, but I was quickly loosing ground. I thought about last resort left – blowing this whole place up.

Like before Patricia, I focused on bringing more power from higher realms and unleashed blast, which leveled whole city into ruin. All lights out. Splinter rocks from ceiling came crushing down. Tremors seemed to become more constant, while quakes upped in magnitude. My visor malfunctioned on all but one modes. It was still good enough to show me thermal images. Trying not to waste time, I immediately run, however that thing leaching onto me spiked me with immobilizing pain. Not waiting for escalation, I simply run to the top, after



rail still usable tracks.

Pumped full of adrenaline, my strengths seemed greater than one could presume, but I wasn't able to reach top quick enough. In that condition I wasn't able to run as quick as normal anyway. I heard yell of succubus on the way. No amount of insecurity helped to quicken the pace. Even though my powers were largely intact, I couldn't make use of them.

And he . . . fuuuu he just laughed. Icy, cold laugh right in the back of my head. Amusing himself. His claws stroking light of my astral body, in places invader didn't look at.

I called out to him, to maybe help me, or be buried under fucking mountain for whole another eternity. Miraculously, he did. One of his claws slashed invader, instantly consuming its soul. Like with switch of a button, my strengths returned to me. I felt solid grip in my hands and could think straight again. Samsara was right on me, just few susses behind. With empowered steps I reached top station before her, but not soon enough. While I run through decontamination chamber, her whip slashed through my back and whole length of rockcrete wall, throwing me on the ground. Unlike her, I couldn't see so good in the complete dark. Since damaged visor obstructed my natural sight I could only rely on close proximity thermal images. Her presence was flickery and she certainly knew how to mask her presence, making it impossible to rely on my astral senses. Sure, I could still hear her as she moved around, but her steps and even swings were barely noticeable in quakes. To remedy it, I just summoned a shield and illuminated all surroundings. Her yells echoed through cave.

For few moments, her constant barrage of attacks made way for psychological warfare. Hiding in various places and making use of her incredibly quick step, tried to confuse me about her whereabouts. Laughter, alluring, deriding, yelling . . . she was crazy after all. Frantically looking around, I noticed jet bike parked in the middle of staging area near workshop. Since there was no better transportation than it, I decided to make run for it. But It wouldn't be so simple. She rushed in front of me, cutting with whip through engine and immediately vanished beyond reach of light, laughing at me. Quakes hastened me up to get out of there. Running up the road I thought about one more devious trick to use. Pieces of gate laid next to entrance . . . but I needed time to grab it and seal door behind me.

So I provoked her by unsheathing sword. Immediately, she rushed out from shadows to cut me, but I was prepared to unleash powerful shockwave. This threw her across whole cavern, giving me precious few seconds to grab piece of gate. I had to get into the shaft and slam it shut. During this frantic process, walkway has been annihilated, twisting, ripping, falling apart and throwing me off ground to bottom of the shaft. I didn't think to use levitation, focusing on sealing entrance. Perhaps not seal, but after getting up, I redid my effort and pulled it in at least half of its thickness, damning precision or fitting altogether. Just imagine tantrum she threw when I pulled it off. For precise summary of our reunion, I yelled her one, very personal, and scurrilous sentence for goodbye and left. Climbed out by using twisted wreckage of walking platform. Of course, lift didn't work as well, so I had to climb out to the surface, the old fashioned way, augmenting movement with all strength I have left.

Once I finally got out, mountains were lit with azure glow of orbital laser performing exterminatus somewhere over horizon. Chunks of mountain



suspended in its gravitational field, glowed with orange brightnes, melting and evaporating. Its light coloring everything blue. Even rays of sun dimmed out in its presence. Shots of macrocannon ripped apart mountain ridge peaks into valleys across horizon. Storm of dust was quickly dissipated by laser's gravity force. Fortunately it happened where I did not leave Valkyrie. From my estimation, whatever they shot at, couldn't be further than 50- 60 kilometers away. Still, my feet felt every bit of tormented planet. Wonderful view of whole basin now turned into extrerminatus landscape.

Radio started to work again and I heard black ritual, yells of Patricia AND Janna, coordinating some kind of attack in spur of righteous fury, calling for more orbital strikes. Contacting them was futile, my PDA couldn't get through to Valkyrie because of this noise. The only thing explanation one could imagine - I was at the wrong place at the wrong time. In radio, cultists cursed sisterhood for breaking their ritual, but I spent enough time in this mess to know it was bullshit. Whatever happened there . . .

Lines

23450 - 23461

Lost due to recording data corruption

Well . . . answer came soon enough. Just as I reached edge of landing platform, giant, purple ray of light shoot up into the sky, clouding whole horizon in thick, black smoke, opening crack in reality. Purple veins of light shimmering in its depths shot thunder cracks in every direction. In few seconds orbital laser was no more. Smoke twirled and clogged in sound of thunderous strikes. I . . . felt unspeakable evil released from its slumber. Warp entity, older than Slaanesh itself has been released. Its prison destroyed. It's shackles no more. It's power resounded within very fabric of space time. Sky of dense smoke begun to burn in faerie fire, intertwining black spots with pink clouds of light, aetheric glow and then a roar shook astral realm. I felt it . . . I felt its immense power. Like gravity crushing my bones under load of hundreds of G's, so was my soul tested against it's presence. Succubus has surely been drained instantly. Whatever life still remained around, as well.

For next few seconds, it sucked out life from whole area, as far as eye could reach. Green and golden meadows of grass turned into scorched cinders. Lush forests and any signs of life charred. Valleys and mountains now turned to dark gray blobs. Plants around me turned to ash and withered into dust, as all its life force have been consumed. I barely managed to retain integrity of my soul. First time I ever encountered such . . . thing.



Pillar of light intensified, spreading it's branches further out upon sky, until rift in reality broken between worlds. Pillar of power dissipated in reality's scar. Warp gate spread over sky, spewing tentacles of dark energy consuming physicality. In vicious scream, resounding within very bounds of astral world, creature seemingly made of warp fire flew into rift with amazing speed. Only thing seen was its slender, burning, winged shape. Once inside, tear begun to close, sucking into itself everything it could. Including mountains. Any rubble left after orbital bombardment was easily consumed. Some chunks of nearby land have been torn off in pieces. Severe under pressure caused immense hurricane, sucking out even air. It lasted only few seconds, but land became . . . unrecognizable. Cracks in ground, displaced some of ridges around me, opening gnawing gaps stretching for miles. Stone showers still falling on ground.

All of it was, perhaps, too much. My body ached from internal damage as well as severe damage to psychic plane. My chest hurt enough to consider less breathing altogether. I dropped to ground and rested for while, exhausted to no end, with fading consciousness. Even pain did not wake me up. But He . . . and his laughter deep within me He . . . was eager to follow it. Butcher it. Consume it. It . . . felt like his whole being convulsed in excitement. We both knew what it meant. I, finally knew why Father tossed me in this place, guiding me through half segmentum to this particular place, where even exploratory fleet did not care to wander. Whatever this entity was, I knew we would clash soon enough, and in doing so . . . probably bury whole world into oblivion.

He . . . cheery and excited, prodded me to get up and run, smashing fields of energy against my wounded astral self.

I managed to get up, but even walking alone seemed like titanic effort. Fortunately, all noise faded. Jamming signal dissipated. My PDA could finally reach into Valkyrie. After few minutes of hailing canonesse Patricia, palatine Dagmara finally responded.

They sounded shocked to know I was still alive. So was I to know Janna still lived. She didn't trash talk but went strictly to business, changing primary orders to my extraction. While transports were launching to help me, sisters tried to ask questions about my findings, but all what happened was reserved for canonesse superior herself. To add to confusion, I ordered to level whole mountain in orbital fire, taking precautions for Patricia's sake. Of course, there were few disagreements, but I called upon my authority over sisterhood. I also got to know why they bombarded surface. Once my signal was lost, searching party was dispatched when I did not answer for too long. My PDA showed lapse of just five hours since our last contact, but to them, it was two whole days.



— Arrival Day [139] — Pursuit day [125] — Day of reign [93_] —

Following my last known position, they stumbled upon heretical hiding site, which turned out to be ancient xeno temple. Eldar temple, or rather prison, in which wych cult has taken nest, alongside Slaanesh heretics. Due to severe number disadvantage, sisters decided to make use of orbital support. Nobody presumed it to be tomb of ancient evil. Janna decided to cut transmission and ordered Patricia back to duties, commanding flight attendants to hasten rescue party.

Another set of Valkyries picked me up in half an hour or so. Hospitalers begun treating me as soon as I got seated. Due to nature of my wounds, there was little they could do in field. I recognized sister superior as one of Janna's celestians we met at monastery and immediately . . . she struck uncanny resemblance to clones from factory. I turned my head around in searching for another known face and . . . oh God . . . Every sister now looked alike. Knowing prime samples and C section growing lab . . . half of order being . . . replicas.

Once we cleared lower atmosphere, Basket Of Thorns renew its bombardment over land. Its bombardment lance array razed whole mountain into molten lava. I felt relief nobody would know its secret anymore.

But . . . problems always only mount up. Sisters brought me to bigger ship and put in apothecarium. Patricia and two squads of her maidens secured my chamber from “unwanted guests”, right . . .

Again . . . I saw thousands of sisters on the ship. Combined with regular voidsmen, it wasn't so pronounced, but I could not unsee it. The more I looked at them, the more I could name their original template. Sister superiors looked more like Ada, Palatines and celestians more like Black Betty. With hair and eye color variants, but still . . . most of regular sisters reminded four templates from section C. It was now clear how order could grow such beauties. I already mentally prepared myself for confrontation with Janna . . . to tell her truth felt like deep, deep lake, filled with dread under the surface.

Ship surgeon took care of my bones, applied ointment for my burnt skin and sewn gaping wounds. It took nearly four hours, after which I could finally lie at ease, pumped with endorphines, sinking into sleep like rock in lake.



— Arrival Day [140] — Pursuit day [126] — Day of reign [94_] —

Next day, Katarina, Janna's right hand on the ship and its captain, came to visit me to estimate my health. According to Magos taking care of medical bay, it would take me 5 full months of recovery, but . . . I advised her upfront, it would take only few days due to my nature. Also, issue of my report came up. Of course, they would not dare to *force* me to write a statement or report, but their oblique and eloquent manner certainly imposed some urgency to the matter.

They wanted to know what happened to me. I was very eager to speak, but only to canonesse superior. And I made it clear that even she doesn't want to know certain secrets. In her own mind there was nothing she couldn't handle. Everyone talk like that until really confronted with reality shattering knowledge.

To make it simple, Katarina served as my messenger to Janna to setup meeting. Due to heated situation and my recent adventure, she pressed for at least some kind of directions. We agreed to talk in private, without written, official statement.

Both canonesse visited me later that day. Both tense and spiked with anger. Too many asinine driven decisions ended in releasing a dark one back into warp, but then . . . who am I to judge.

Our meeting was very quick. She only asked me if I found anything that could help us in destroying demon. I had to explain difference between demon, amalgamation spawned from energies of its warp patron, read four chaos gods, and entity of the warp, which was birthed from immaterium, just like chaos gods, as egregor. Janna asked how to fight it. Funny, right. She asked me how to fight a demon like this. Bitter pill for all to swallow was that my powers were the only thing capable of erasing such being. Neither wanted to listen to it, taking it for petty boasting removed from reality.

Cutting our conversation, Janna moved forward to discuss what happened inside enemy's outpost. It was hard to tell them, so I didn't, reducing it to one simple remark about clone laboratory. They felt I was hiding something and vociferously demanded answers. I didn't deny there was a secret to it, but lied it had nothing to do with war nor sisterhood. Just a personal business to set straight. To sooth their curiosity, I spoke of thing Reitziger told about our chances of winning . . . to stop this unholy thing, we had to read “even more unholy book”. For Patricia this was out of question, but Janna . . . stood disturbingly quiet. Like she almost knew I had an answer. Gazed at me from under brows like she didn't like what would follow very, very much. Pat, bit discouraged, bit confused waited for her superior to speak, shifting sights. Janna broke lengthy silence asking “what do you need?”. In sheer disbelief, her underling begun to loose composure. Janna seemed to grasp situation on multiple threads at once. Perhaps bitter truth was easier to swallow for her who knew nothing, than to Patricia who had insight into case. At least I thought she knew nothing.

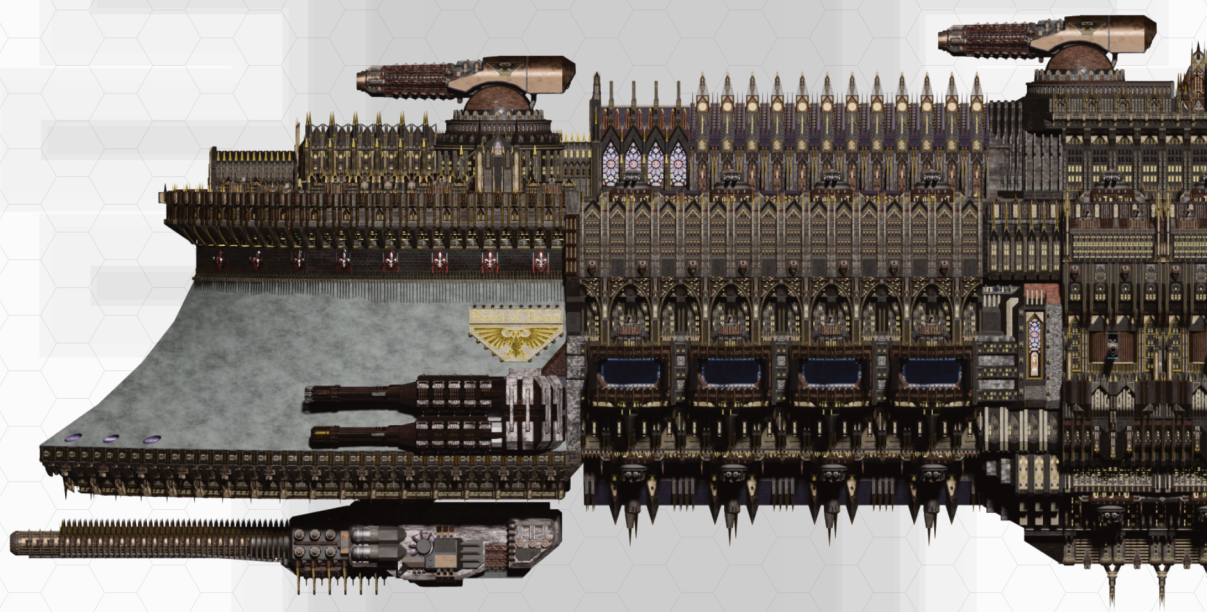
Asking her to calm down was as effective as throwing curses at moon. Janna had to bring her to order by force. I felt in her . . . growing, impending doom. Patricia . . . I had no way to know if sigil had been carved onto her, but certainly her programming surfaced through. It was not only out of her character, but out of any sororitas character. In the end, Janna struck her with fist to bring her into



compliance for stepping out of her capacity. It was . . . heart breaking to witness. Celestians walked in to check if everything was all right. Janna dismissed them outright.

Once we were left in privacy again, canoness renew her question. I . . . told her, them both, about Kaifas and his excursion into archives. Related to her everything we heard, what I suspected and what Reitziger hinted at. If there was something like black grimoire in there, I suspected, that vault held answers how to bind this thing into prison again. Not to mention diaries of inquisitor. She assumed it should be the same thing which Hakobyan looked for. There was no telling, as neither of us ever had any contact. Before any hasty moves, I advised we should chase it, before cultists manage to act. And inform him only after we secured it. We might have acted like renegades, but there was no time to waste. Mere chaos cults paled in comparison with independent warp entity. Janna accepted, under one condition, that I would not try to run from my bodyguards, vanishing into some hole again. I did not ever tried to explain there was no running attempt. Girls left me with warm farewell, although I knew Janna wanted to know. Oh, I felt her desperate need to know. Just . . . didn't know how to tell her.

Anyway . . . we set course for Lokinyth forgeworld, making preparations with local covenants.



Basket of Thorns

Ship Class Exorcist Class Grand Cruiser

Class Specification Length: approx 7.83 km | Height: approx 3.53 km at fin

Mass: 42.7 Megatonnes | Operational Time: 473 days

Crew 108 000 Imperial Navy + 3 400 Adepta Sororitas

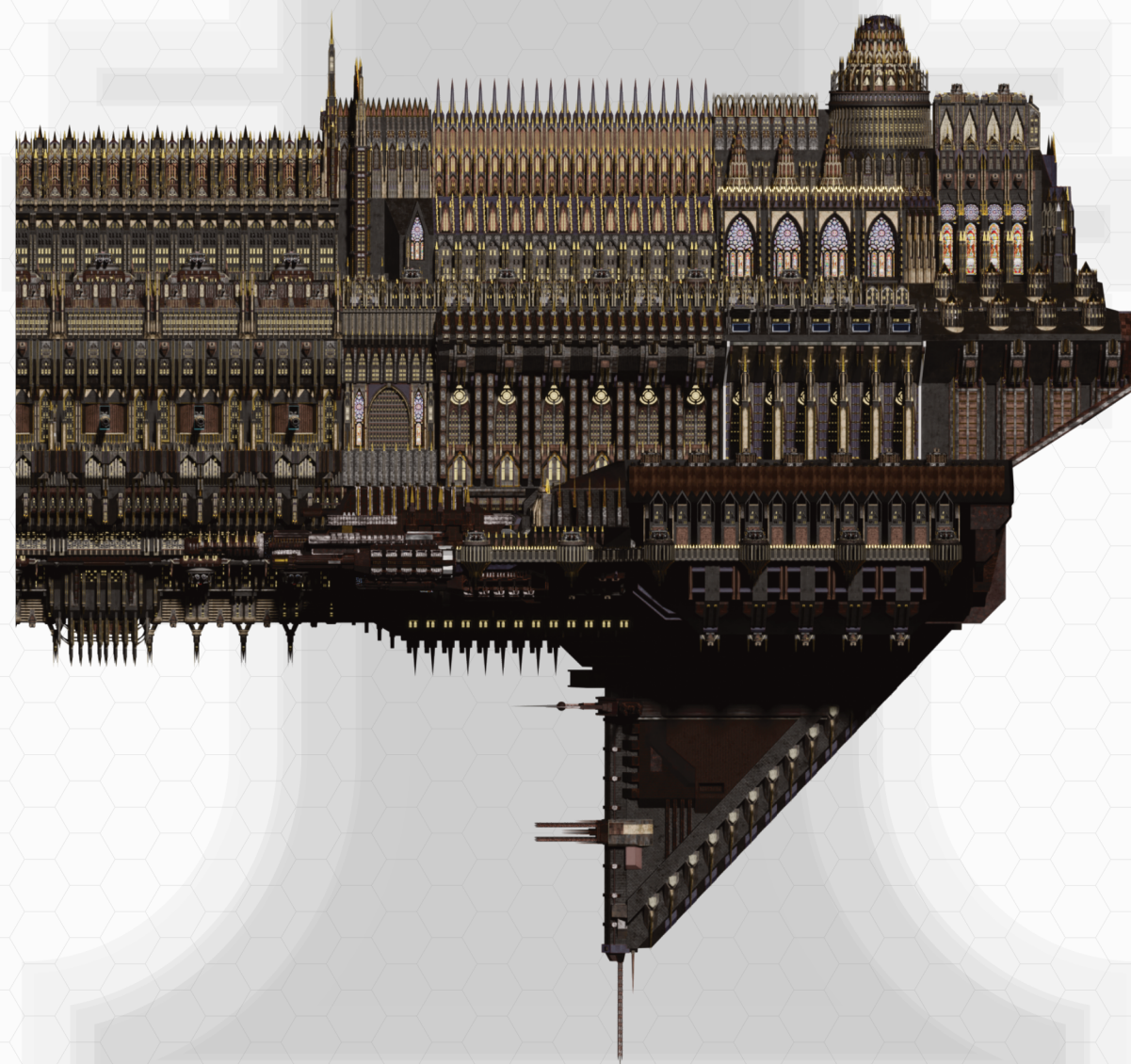
Hangar 18 Valkyrie wings, 12 Fury Interceptor wings, 4 Shark Assault Boat wings

Role [Battlegroup Haephestus] Flagship

Station [Lokinyth Forgeworld]

Captain Canoness Superior of [Order of Laurel Crown] [Janna Melendi]

Armaments 1x Exterminatus Orbital Lance, 1x Nova Cannon, 2x Hull fixed Super-Heavy lance
2x Turret mounted Super-Heavy Lance, 8x Hull fixed super-heavy Macrocannon,
10x Broadside Heavy Macrocannon Battery, 6x Torpedo Bay, 46x Medium lance Turret,
10x Light Macrocannon Turret, 28x light Lance Turret, 116x AA Quad Turbolaser





— Arrival Day [144] — Pursuit day [130] — Day of reign [98_] —

4 days later, when my wounds healed up enough to somewhat freely move around, Patricia invited me to her quarters for a chat. Surprise, surprise. Reluctantly, but I had to comply. Four big sisters walked me all the way to her office.

Since this was a big ship, extent of polish over decorations in officer quarters impressed as much as noble houses. This was after all, joint operation. Our guards already knew the drill and left us alone in office.

Before we talked about gist of this meeting, she offered me tea or coffee, like proper host. Her usual self however, was . . . waning. I could feel tension within her and imagined what she wanted to ask for, but . . . we attempted small talk first. Despite her battlefield experience, our “chat” was painfully devoid of charm. To . . . not to waste our time, I asked her straightforward what was her business with me. She walked to her desk and opened shelf, when Janna busted in, voicing her displeasure over our “clandestine” meetings. Seeing how canoness was about to stay, her two guards walked out, closing doors. Patricia clearly didn't plan on it, pushing drawer back in haste. I stood up from chair to greet her.

From get go, she treated us both like kids doing something improper, behind her back. Her attitude started to wear me down. It didn't take long to show her displeasure. She came closer, almost shouting her queries about our business together. Standing in middle of office, pointed finger on Patricia and ordered to explain herself, but Pat didn't know what to explain. Janna yelled at her not to play dumb, because she knew for quite long time there were secrets held back from her. She even brought up my case as more trustworthy than her own canoness in her own order. It was then I noticed Janna brought pistol holstered on her thigh and . . . knew this was going to get ugly, one way or another.

She accused Pat of great misconduct, bringing up multiple cases where her special investigation team failed to comply with basic disclosure requirement, always hiding behind top secret access, even to canoness superior, which for Janna, well . . . signified great misprision. On top of that, she wasn't informed about situation on Rotuna II, even after direct inquiry. All of it crowned with failed attempt of infiltration into monastery's data vault.

Patricia tried to defend herself, remembering how she received this post from Janna herself, with very duty of keeping order's most secret cases, secret. Unfortunately, for her superior no secrets were grave enough to keep it from reporting to highest authority.

Clearly one sided quarrel ended when Janna turned to me, asking why I even came her in first place. You know, what was the promise she gave me to conspire with her. Which was very serious accusation against her fellow sister, or . . . not fellow sister anymore? Either way, she came close to me, filling whole office with her presence. And I mean presence. As beautiful Lydia could be, or as strong Patricia, or mouthy as Leonida, Janna was person of great charisma, spirit and will. When I say she had presence, she really had that something with her . . . something no clone ever could. Perhaps it was self confidence bordering on . . . audacity or hubris . . . It's hard to pinpoint.

She wanted, demanded, threaten to torture it out. What is so important that



we met outside any appointment ever recorded, going as far as feigning my bodyguard scheduled route. When I told her what happened from my perspective, she glanced Patricia from corner of eye. Then . . . pulled pistol out, aiming her and I was like “wait, what, why is she aiming at her, not me”. Yet I didn't need to see Pat's face to feel wailing doom coming her way. She felt hopeless and drained of strength. Her aura almost faded. Air became thick with tension.

Janna asked me nicely what did I think it was about. This tonne was so calm and amicable and kinda dignifying. One of those times, when you realize that angry canoness is preferable to this artificial, slight smile. I estimated she wished to talk about what kind of monstrosities orbital laser put to rest. Pat tried to speak. Two syllables came out, chopped and staggered, before being cut back by Janna's silencing yell, turning head and gaze back to me. Her expression looked composed and even amused. Cold and ready to kill if something would not tick her fancy.

No roundabout way to say it, so I related in few sentences what lied down there, but it wasn't enough to explain anything to her. She insisted to *elucidate* why would her own sister misinform her order about whole situation. It was fist time I heard a canoness doctor records of their deployment, including spread of false orders. Patricia sagged into chair, dropping head to chest as she found herself on heresy trial. Janna clearly held her in high regard, or she would kill her on the spot for what she has done. Or perhaps it was still, this care for fellow sisters, so propagated in the order.

To avoid catastrophic misunderstanding, I brought out more and more detail, little by little, making sure Janna understood everything in correct order. From very day Kitlana deceived me, encounter with demons, how Lydia told me about her death, departure from palace, up to arrival in orbit of ILU2. She listened very closely, switching gaze from me to her sister from time to time. Once mystery begun to clear, she calmed down, asking Patricia who and how was informed of such rubbish and finally why would she destroy official record. It turned out, she heard about her grave injuries from Morgrabius del Porru through her agent net. They reported of her death and loss of whole planet. It seemed they weren't trustworthy after all. Janna admitted to killing heretic del Porru herself. Not only was he awfully incompetent but secretly supplied Orks with gear belonging to Imperial Guard, further diminishing battle capability. Rumors of her grave injuries were exaggerated. As we could see. And just a rouse to calm their enemies, creating safe environment to come out of hiding. She summarized all this action as mildly successful, but still a success. Yet ,she would not think her most information warfare versed officer could fall for such tricks.

All this however did not explain clandestine operations Patricia enacted right under her nose. And we came to gist of the matter – what did I find inside that mountain. She quickly added severe frustration over its destruction, since camera in my helmet was rendered inoperable as soon as I entered jamming range. And later destroyed.

To begin with, I told her about prayer book I was given and little note inside, complimenting it with our meeting earlier that day. Cutting short my way to planet, because they had the footage, I related in detail my entrance, omitted loitering and finally started to talk about clone centers, which had Janna swing her head in anger, clenching jaw, but remaining silent. Only when I described Haemonculi workshop, Janna bursted in anger at Patricia, yelling for response, if



this what she hid from order, but . . . I told her it was not the end of surprises. Patricia . . . knew what was coming. I felt her despair, like prisoner thrown on chopping block. No running away. No way out. Her face frowned so much I thought she was going to cry. This angered Janna. She wasn't expecting her most capable canonesse to break down. In moment of silence which followed, she just threw her a gaze of contempt.

I brought up case of Synthia, how she broke down in front of seraphims, but she couldn't care less about heretic long gone. It was perfect place to uncover my knowledge how Synthia was actually locked away, not judged and . . . how she later was killed in her own room. Free from witnesses. It strung a nerve in her. Her eyes visibly told me I didn't want to go in that direction.

On the other hand, it hunted me to know, if Janna knew how actually Synthia regained her youth. She winced slightly, being fully convinced she made deal with a devil, the same one Mendaz did, but . . . it was a miss. Imagine her face when I told her real Synthia was long dead. The one she knew . . . was a clone with conscious and soul transferred from former body. Her mouth opened in disbelief. Anger lessen dramatically, almost like she was scared to hear what came next. Turned eyes to Patricia. Her aura displayed great deal of . . . care? Perhaps. Symphaty? Certainly empathy. That is how it felt to me. She might have held her in crosshair of a pistol, but sisterhood is sisterhood.

In anticipation of revelation on par with releasing a warp entity, she looked back at me. There was never a good way to tell such story, so I just . . . told her up front about 6 prime specimens cloned inside facility. That 4 of them seemed to be perfectly sawn together from various parts, while two other . . . uffffffffffff Two were Drukhari succubi clones, which were the most prevalent template. I brought out my PDA and showed her picture of Pat as well as sketch of Samsara. She grabbed it and walked to desk, commanded Patricia to stand up and face her, holstering her gun. I couldn't see her face, but she sounded startled. I mean . . .

To be perfectly clear with her I had to say the quiet part out loud. . . That most of her sisters are clone derivatives of Drukhari. And Haemonculi experiments.

We stood for a while in silence. Longer while. Until Janna threw my PDA on floor with valiant fervor and stomped it until broken to dozens of pieces, just to fire five shots over parts too sturdy to break. Contingent of warmaiden instantly dropped into office ready to fire all they got, but Janna stopped them with hand sign. Told them everything was fine, and to leave us alone. With great deal of confusion, everyone departed without a word. She walked to Patricia and put her hands on her cheeks, gently asking "if she remembers". Pat confirmed with brave yes. Janna asked how many more remember, which amounted to only one. Even I became curious about it. Returning to mild composure, Patricia explained that no sister could bear memory of what happened to them in those laboratories, each and every committing suicide with no exception . . . except her. Total tally, up to her knowledge, amounted to over 26 000 sisters over Synthia's 20 years. . . time in the office. This tally covered over 75% of total losses of whole order over expanse of subordinate covenants in sector Hephaestus. Said she tried to discover how to help sisters, without giving whole world cause to purge them.

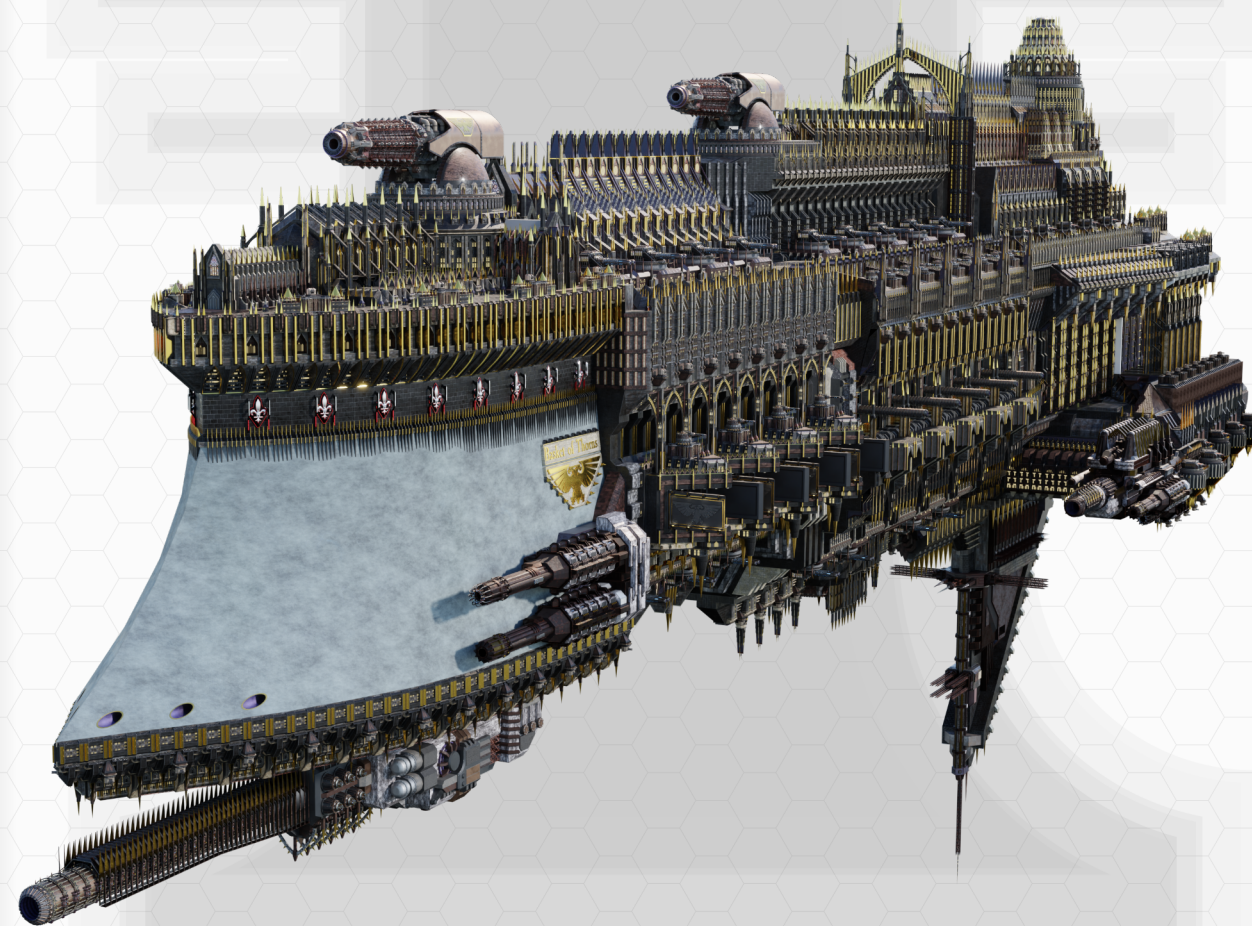
Janna . . . well . . . Janna gave her a loving hug. Then sat Pat in the chair and turned to me asking if there was anything important to mention. And there was. I gave her notice about scars in shape of some kind of sigil engraved on clones'



belly. Sister did not deny she had one. One gaze was enough to understand she wanted to know more, but all I could infer, is that it could be contained withing black grimoire, because for now, all it looked just like few redone signs of Eldar lexicon. Janna asked if Pat ever tried to use database to uncover meaning of it, to which answer was positive, but futile in the end. She confessed playing with data entries to make sure nobody would discover this truth.

With nothing more to know about this case, canonesse readied to leave office, giving me hand wave to follow. Since situation was very . . . peculiar. I asked her before walking out, if she really would leave it alone, over which she proclaimed "value of a sister are her virtues and devotion to the Emperor, not their past".

Coming out of office, we met whole wall of battle sisters ready for command. Much, much more then we initially left. Janna, unwavering like adamantium wall, ordered all sisters to follow her in silence. Dagmara eagerly asked if something has gone wrong, but she has been assured to be told all in time and for now, Patricia was to be left alone. Last but not least, I was asked to return to my chambers. She decided I did not need tail anymore and released purifiers commandery from bodyguard duty.





— Arrival Day [145] — Pursuit day [131] — Day of reign [99_] —

Next day, commander called me over to council room to discuss what has actually transpired in office and to get precise, detailed version of each encounter with her sisters. She was most curious about Kitlana and her play. Too bad I didn't think of bringing her parts back. Anyway, we indulged in very long confession session, after which she absolved me from my sins of ignorance, acknowledging my contribution to Emperor's fight against the wicked. 7 sister investigators served as witness committee to our meeting.

Then, we changed surrounding to reliquary, where Patricia and 3 other canoneses waited. It was about how we should proceed with entering inquisitorial vault, but before we started, as governor of Mara, I was given summary of what happened in my domain. Nothing much changed, but completion of new production facility looked like great help for war effort. First batch of mobile armored forces were already of their way to support war against Orks. Lydia managed to quell any signs of cults without much resistance. Military reported complete takeover of all districts, allowing for even greater reinforcement of our next move against separatists on Shogo. However, grave news emerged from inquisition, calling for erasure of my image from any media of information. Nobody knew if it was a mistake or deliberate action, but Order of Laurel Crown sent envoy to draw greater understanding. Thus, my presence was very unofficial. Janna surmised that my position of governor was coming to an end. Ehhhhhhhhh . . . I could assume as much long before. Whatever this inquisitor Hakobyan tried to achieve eluded my understanding.

- A: Yes, but how could I have known then. How many people consider inquisition their first hotline to call when they are implicated in release of ancient warp entity?
- A: You weren't exactly heart welcoming, and didn't care to ask either.
- A: You might have been, but what were we supposed to think at that time.
- A: Like it wasn't the worst case scenario inquisition could imagine. I saw how your peers burned people at stake for much, much less.

Anyway, we decided to do it quietly. Just get in, *PROCURE*, yes, and get out like nobody ever knew. Yhy . . . like heist of such scale never blew up in anyone's face. With a bit of luck, our credentials would help us to get through.

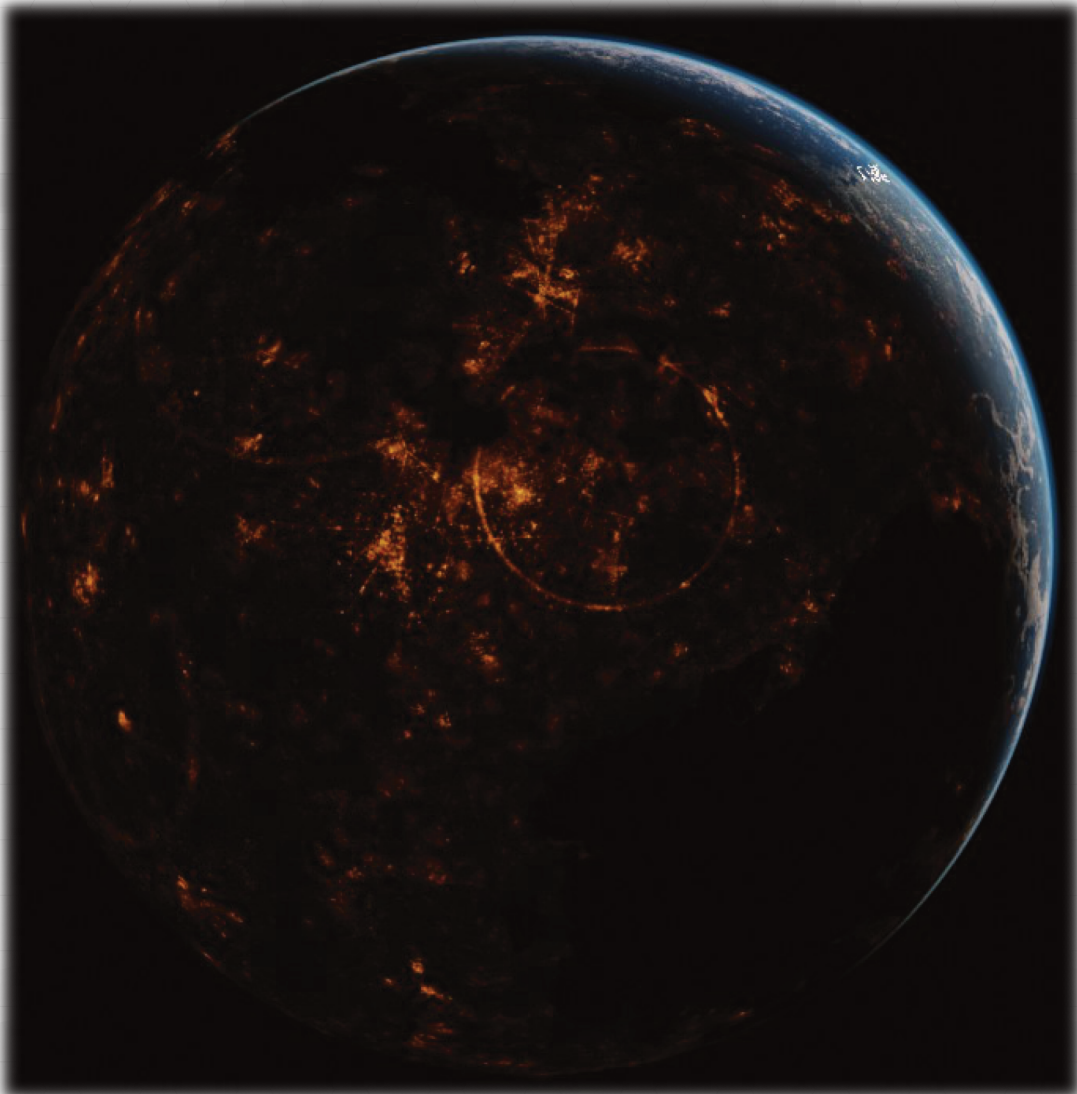
Plan included me, of course, and Ghost, because sisters didn't know how to infiltrate and then navigate through forgeworld. We didn't ask for help of any techpriests in fear they would speak few words to conclave. Imagine this erupting shitstorm. Janna promised to dock us without problems, under cover of resupply, which gave us more or less 10 standard days, due to half full storage. Ghost was overjoyed to tackle mission most deemed impossible. And suicidal. That's the keyword. With few leads from Kaifas' story where to look for archives in first place, I decided it would be best to pay visit to Schootex. If intel I gathered on him



was correct, he would want to cooperate. Sure, I risked exposure, but so would he. And stealing was always an option.

Location Lokinyth III | Lokinyth | [SO/21299]
Role Subsector Capital
Planet B-2 | Habitable Mining Outpost
Population 20 013 565 301 as of M41.954
Specialization Forgeworld







— Arrival Day [146] — Pursuit day [132] — Day of reign [100] —

Before we arrived at Lokinyth, we had to perform some patrol on the way, escorting convoy of supplies from Stella Attica to Lokinyth III. During transition in warp, navigator detected SoS signal coming from freighter fleet.

We managed to trace signal and emerge in the same system, relatively speaking. Tricen Ward was engaged in battle with Drukhari raider ship and bleeding out fast. We tried to intercept communications, however due to very poor reception, captain dispatched probes up front. It took eight hours to arrive at the destination. Most of convoy was already downed. Light cruiser drifted between planets. 4 frigates escorting convoy already destroyed. Four ships still tried to run. By the time we came close, two blew up in Drukhari lance barrage. Once we reached fighting range, Janna ordered boarding assault upon raider barge. This was very perplexing, so I rushed towards teleportarium to talk it over, but . . . how naive was I.

Whilst sisters prepared for lightning strike, we argued with canonesse about validity of such undertaking. When Patricia came out of prep chamber I kinda started to understand what was going on. Not soon enough to have Janna point finger on me once again, yelling, because I dared to question Emperor's faithful servants. Sisters stood behind her like wall, even in certain death. I guess my status of governor was just a paper trail for them after all. Either way, I backed down. Not because canonesse yelled at me, but because it became apparent her intent was to give sisters death of dignity, dying in battle, not as abhuman abomination slain due to . . . their peculiar origin. In twenty minutes, almost 400 sisters, at first glance gathered from various and random squads, but to my eye prepared from . . . similar originals, went off to assault Drukhari barge.

Patricia waited with her celestians, since their job was to secure defending freighter and provide assistance. I felt like going with them despite unhealed astral wounds. Part of me would spike my consciousness with guilt if I left them now. In few minutes, after properly readying myself, Janna gave clearance for departure.

We managed to teleport into empty hangar bay. Sounds of fighting in distance, screams of torment and aetheric yells of passion reverberated through empty corridors. Patricia established contact with captain. 4 squads of sisters scattered in search of survivors. Me, canonesse and her four bodyguards run towards sieged bridge. On our way, hundreds of dead bodies, dissected and ripped apart, colored floor with red. Corridors sawn with bullet holes and lance melted spots. Whatever or whoever fought, did so with disregard to machinery integrity. Closer we reached to bridge, the more I understood who waited at us. Long and thin stokes of cuts, spanning few meters across wall, door frame and ceiling, cut gate in perfect half. Bodies dismembered with fantastic precision. Meat cut precise and clean like laser edge. Even standard armor plating looked pristinely sliced. We met our glaces with Patricia, who already knew what I was about to say and told me not to say it. Then asked me to leave it to her and help others at bridge. It bothered me to wonder if her sisters knew anything, which instilled moment of curiosity in them. Patricia spoke that their greatest enemy awaits and there is no one else who can withstand their wickedness but the most fervent of



Emperor's servants . . . Then sent her girls to secure entry to west bay no.3. As farewell, she asked me not to interfere . . . for sake of their redemption.

You can imagine how little fucks do I give about redemption, but I perfectly knew what went on in her head. In her heart. On purely mechanical level, this was just a fucking waste of resources and manpower. Very capable manpower. For sisterhood, this would be a loss of great hero and "guiding light". But for her . . . this seemed like the last chance of fulfilling desire to serve the Emperor in purity.

I left them be . . . but trailed behind, just in case. Sisters behaved very loudly and feisty, screaming praises to the Emperor in hopes to lure their pray, but how little did they know who was the hunter.

When sisters truly run out to cargo bay no.3 silence befallen my corridor. Before taking any step, silent and soft sounds close in from higher, engineering levels. I Prepared behind staircase to ambush whoever was coming, but felt life signs of only one thing. In few next second, as clunk became clearer, another succubi run down from stairs and immediately reached behind my back, like she already knew my position. Before I could turn around, she was already behind me again, landing softly in corridor with a knee bend after a pirouette jump.

A1, or original template, played with me like doll toy. Before I could even react, she stood in middle of corridor smiling . . . moistening lips. Just as with case of Samsara, her looks . . . well it's an experience from other world. Those sweet, sweet looks . . . Even her hair glittered in radiant light, contrasting with darkness of corridor so much in addition to her eldrich, subliminal manipulation. Without something helping her from beyond, she didn't achieve mental grip on me.

Like everyone, she welcomed me as morning star, stretching her luscious body if front of me, coming closer few steps, but gave up as I walked back. I can't say for sure, but I didn't . . . "grab" her in my clutches and squeezed to pulp, taking into account Patricia's wish. She herself was curious how someone like me managed to kill Samsara, obnoxiously playing with her hair and flashing this body for me time and time again. I indulged her a bit, responding that her petty plan failed and she couldn't warp my sense of self. It made her laugh, adding that nobody liked Samsara anyway and I should not worry myself with likes of her, tossing in few words I couldn't understand correctly. Some abbreviations of Eldar, probably their local cant. Delighted to see I understood so much, she let me know her name, Kiera'Leth, and told me in laughter to remember well, because I would be screaming it later. She turned around, ostentatiously exposing her half nude body, put two fingers of her mouth and . . . sent me a smooch with a wink . . . Then run away.

As much as I wanted to fantasize, my thoughts revolved around what could happen to sisters. Wavering whether to really help them or not ended with another ruckus happening on higher levels. With no time to loose, I made my way to bridge.

There were only few agents before main gate. Two used some kind of bladed equipment to cut out hole. They spotted me even before I emerged out of corner, disengaging equipment and standing round. They tried to fight, but were squashed to bloody bits with psychic grip.

Once they were dealt with, damaged vox caster in fromnt of gate resounded with great applause of multiple people. 1st officer was heavenly joyous to see someone come to their help, especially myself. I tried to open gate but it has been



too damaged to operate normally. He advised me to wait, while his men would transport people via secret passage. When he told me how much time it would take, I took shorter route, breaking doors open myself. Still not dangerous to healing astral body, but I felt the strain. Inside was packed with people. So much, soldiers had little room to setup any weapons. Everyone cheered to see path to freedom. Captain Banabus, both surprised and delighted to see governor himself to come in their aid, run to me in litany of opulent praises to the Emperor. Few nobles stuck behind consoles demanded to be finally rescued from "this shithole". None of them had a spark of gratitude. One voice told man to at least try to be grateful for help, stood up from ground and turned to me. And I saw her . . . aaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh . . . Ada. The very woman this all started for. It explained why succubus matron assaulted a damn freighter. And how, in white hells, ship had such good security.

I . . . I became stupefied. Unable to make sense of this whole game Reitziger played. In an instant, I imagined someone had bomb on them, or worse, secret cultist trying to infiltrate our ship. Before one person could extend their hand to me, I held them all back with hand gesture, ordering to stop. Captain's face paled as I engaged my screening powers in front of them. 1st officer panicked, soldiers didn't know what to do. They wanted to know what was wrong, but I kept silent and looking into each soul gathered there for any surprises. They saw my eyes glowing out in bright, golden light and became terrified as smudges of lightning arcs sparked around my auric field. Ada shouted my name, but even that didn't break my concentration. I relaxed few second later, finding no trace of corruption at all. Captain was informed of what just happened and everyone breathed easy again. Officers wanted to know my orders, if any. Due to extension of damage, ship had to be abandoned and teleportatium was the only way out of there. I coordinated sisters to escort people.

Guardsmen colonel took his men and scouted ahead, while officers begun to walk people out. I . . . stood ground, hoping to . . . meet Ada. When crowd partially lessened, and their group came closer, we really did meet. And, oh the urge to give her a hug . . . but reality demanded I stayed focused, so we just talked. Both of us felt joy of meeting each other. Her aura became . . . full spirit like. She finally became human like. Whatever technology allowed that, didn't concern me.

And yet, due to tense situation, our time amounted only to seconds, being rushed by officers. I called to captain, still standing in front of main console, to give me feedback from hangar bay no.3. I just had to see what was going on.

Patricia still fought with succubus with sisters lying on ground dismembered. From size of blood stains, I could surmise they died as soon as fight started. Canoness however, being spawn of succubus herself, held on. This greatly surprised officers around. Both the fact she was still alive and so agile. But I knew, she wasn't winning. Not even close. Kiera'leth was just playing around. She used bladewhip to inflict shallow cuts. It wasn't noticeable in video feed too much, but there were dozens of cuts splitting armor. Some bled. Just as we were about to go as well, Patricia . . . slipped over pool of blood. In an instant, wych cut off her leg in middle of thigh. With few remaining drops of life, Patricia pulled gun from fallen sister, but another acrobatic jump around over her left same arm cut off as well. Waiting for doom, she chanted verses of Divine Throne psalm but succubus didn't kill her outright. Bit by bit, she twisted ceremonial dagger in one place, then another, then another . . . She tried not to scream, but . . . Drukhari know to



to incite pain . . . Since we didn't have time to look at her martyrdom, I cut off feed, asked 1st officer to prepare copy of footage and run. We had to cut off losses while we still could escape.

I went ahead and overtook whole column of runaways to scout possible solutions. There were only three entrances to telportarium, so it was easy to defend. All I had to do is collapse them, wait for evacuation aaaaaaaaand finished. As it ever worked so easily . . .

We managed to teleport almost all civilians and half of military when power dropped. Sisters contacted Basket of Thorns for immediate evacuation. Janna immediately authorized two wings of Valkyries, but we had to make our way towards hangar bay. ETA 25 minutes.

Only techpriest we had already teleported out so there was no hope of diagnosing, much less repairing broken things. First, we had to gear up whoever remained. Fortunately there was enough equipment in prep chambers.

Now came the hard part – not getting killed by wych. I hoped all she cared about was me, so I planned to just bait her out and let rest safely reach landing bay.

First things first. Passage had to be made passable again. Sound of uncollapsing tunnel spread in dead silence in piercing screech. We made sure to instruct everyone in total and dead silence protocol so they wouldn't start to yell or make sudden movements which could be heard.

One advantage we had was failing support system. With oxygen levels dropping significantly below standard even for human, Eldar body would surely take great deal of handicap. I went separate way, making loud noises, while remaining sororitas led everyone else in silence out, to landing bay. Fortunately, neither of us met with succubus. It appeared as whole ship vacated already. Valkyries arrived and we could depart without further slaughter. In strange coincidence, raider barge disengaged into warp already.

Second vessel became consumed by internal fire. Survivors were very few. Six life pods managed to launch. We continued to search for survivors aboard other vessels for next standard day. We found large number of survivors aboard one of vessels which lost main power generator and engines in battle. Most of crew seemed intact, but no further luck elsewhere. Once all units finished, ship returned to code blue and non essential personnel returned to normal schedules.

At one hand, I wanted to see Ada again, but on the other . . . I was sure that inquisitorial dispense over my person would cut it short anyway. It didn't however hampered my attempts. Convoy manged to spread survivors in way to not strain resources. Due to shortage of beds, IIIIIII . . . proposed to house some of them in my own quarters. Beside bed there were two sofas so ... I proposed Count Germain to come into my quarters. Ada was delighted to, which influenced his decision.

By now, I became infamous despite inquisitorial warrant of my iconography, for precisely that – shortest lived governor, who was being eradicated from history for helping people. It didn't help in this endeavor. If inquisition wouldn't undertake such operation, probably nobody outside Mara would know about me to such extent. In addition to my constant involvement in military operations, knowledge about me spread very fast. Faster than erasing my name. Germain stated that I was very peculiar type of governor, who acted



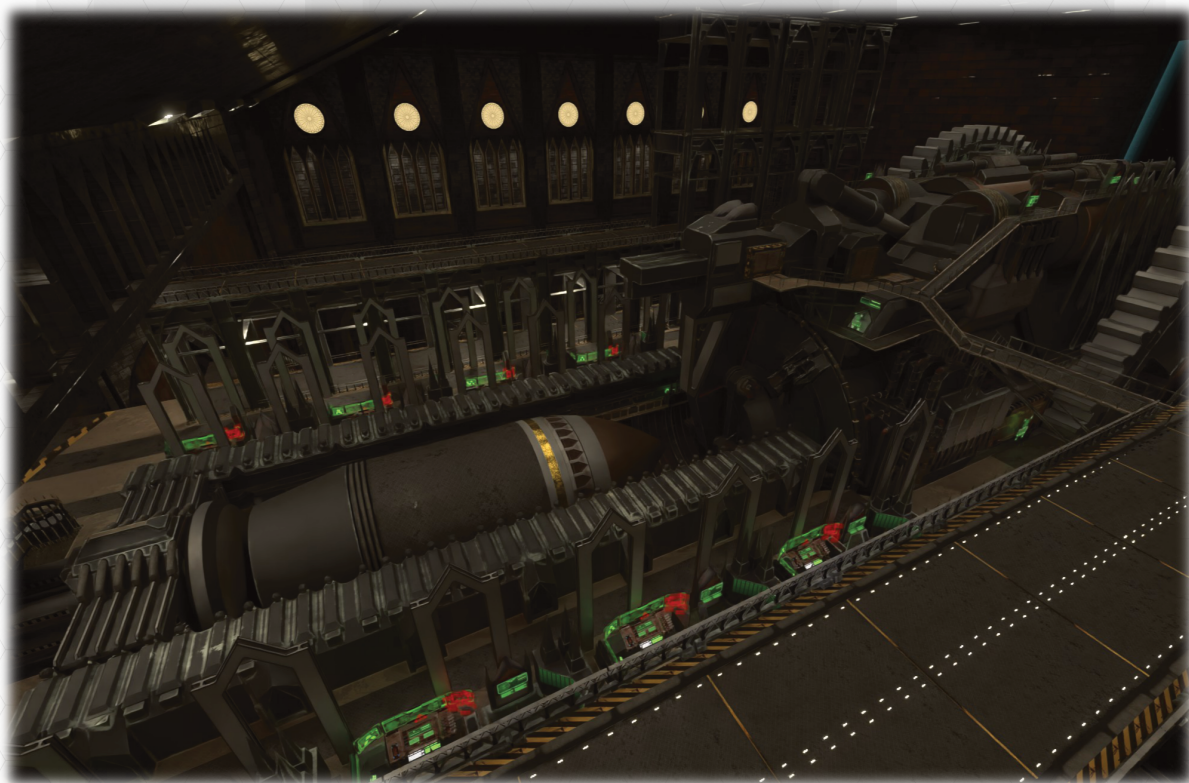
instead of ordering to act. Especially when taking into account taking back whole planet just in one month, without calling reinforcements. It was of course collective effort and really took 3 months, but you know. . . nobility chit chatter.

In those next few days, I managed to spend some time with Ada. Hard to tell how close we become, due to my knowledge of inevitable, pending doom, but I guess close enough to speak about Reitziger and herself.

She told me, that he had secret hideout in asteroid belt of Rotuna system, where he also built cloning laboratory. Very hard to talk about herself, due to awareness of how and why she became alive. I soothed her worries of her end, reciting back what Edmund said about clone growth and their lifespan. With a bit of luck, she could die a normal human life. With a bit of unluck . . . she would live forever as clone spawn of a succubus, chased by witch hunters.

Anyway, it got me envious to hear how popular she became, already receiving marriage proposals. Just imagine. For now, she was not yet courted. Said she waited for the right man. I used my deeper psychic reach to . . . probe her, and saw she really did mean me. I . . . was as sad as happy. There she was. Waiting for my one move, one word, but . . . in the end, it was all going to blow to shit anyway, no matter if I protected her or not. Once we reached Lokinyth shipyard, Germain would take her further to Hephæstus Secundus. They weren't a pair yet, but . . . I felt it was best to leave her in his hands. Best she fled battlefield, before catastrophe happened. I didn't actually tell her about it but . . . now . . . I don't even know if it would changed anything.

It all went according to plan anyway . . . his plan . . .



— Arrival Day [152] — Pursuit day [138] — Day of reign [106] —

6 days later, we finally reached forgeworld. Manufactorum spanned only quarter of north continent. Massive factories working tirelessly day and night, manned by billions of workers in sky scraping towers dedicated to machine god, now run cold. Massive shipyards building miles long space vessels. Faceless masses crawling on the surface like army of dots. Among them, the most massive structure. The main port, serving as capital spire and orbital elevator anchor, housing 6 freighters at once. Sprawling city hubs, rusting in welter of cables, pipes, and neon lights, controlling flow of billions of tonnes of raw materials each day. The ever ravenous forges spewing black fumes miles high, obscuring direct sunlight, cutting through wispy clouds.

Janna had already arranged resupply order. Due to her fame, power and position as head of local Order of Adepta Sororitas, many doors just opened up by themselves. Even outside Mara, influence of sisterhood was very strong over all planets with stationary covenants. Lokinyth had it's own, separate covenant build from Skiitari forces. Sisterhood was led by canoness Magos Domina Kitvarna. Peculiar combination I haven't seen before. Perhaps for better.

Janna, Katarina, Dagmara, celestians, commissar Aisha, navigator Helga and me, met with her and whole cohort of metal sisters. I have to admit she was very polite but not cloy. Pleasant to talk to. Very . . . succinct and straightforward.

Her underlings looked like their helmets were welded permanently. Which they were, I mean after all, all of them were mechanicus acolytes. Filtering apparatus was required, since, aaaaaaaaaa, you know . . . air within forgeworld city is not your friend. Fortunately, due to big interruption in production few last weeks, purification plants were able to filter most of it, leaving no need for further protection.

Eight legged carriage, resembling a spider, was supposed to be our transport to high speed train station, which would take us to medical resort on south shore of continent. Apparently it served as best tourist resort on planet. We had other plans however. Meaning I had another plan. During our journey to station, we went again through details of our risky plan. Janna arranged for me another place to stay. Close to forge world spires, barely an hour of walk distance. Ghost would take me there. I had one audience with fabricator general Shchootex planned for next day. Nobody in order, except our pack, knew about it. Janna was supposed to meet him in secret to discuss recent chaos spread, avoiding unnecessary questions, procedures or attention. She appreciated if it remained in secret, since my appearance would rise great deal of questions.

We parted ways on station. Ghost already waited for me in back alley with proper change of clothes to blend in with population. Then, we could take ferry to central. We arrived late at local night. From there, we had to travel on foot. Our joint laid in high layer of underhive. I understood we were under cover, but for pity's sake, this was below even my standards. Ghost used refractor field to blend in with surroundings, while I dealt with landlord. His goons eyed me like sweet roll. Fortunately, there was no trouble. How Janna even managed to find place like this was beyond my understanding.



He was a magos after all and small talk did not indulge him, so we went straight to the business. I revealed what I pulled from de Estana's head and things later pieced from various sources about his involvement in killing KIT-4E and Kaifas. He denied. Voicebox made it impossible to decipher tone. His aura . . . well, as aura of every other adeptus mechanicus, what little left of it, was just bland blank. We tried explaining it wasn't about accusations and we just needed a help in investigation, because their archives contained forbidden technology. It roused him and he bloated out binary commands, which moved many pieces of equipment, servitors and brought up noosphere on line. While there were commands executed on display in front of us, I inferred that previous fabricator discovered it, which led to her demise and since we knew why, he could help us



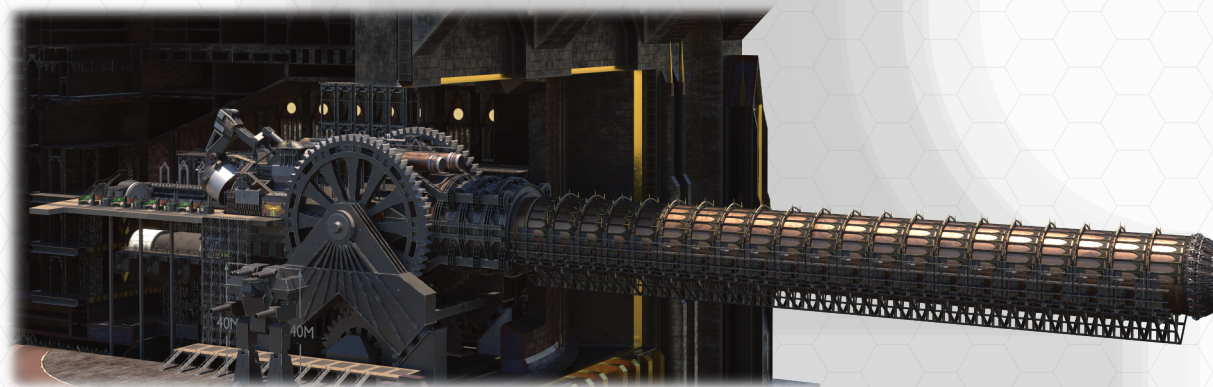
They proceeded to ceremony of opening the vault. Kaifas said it took two



whole days to open vault. I tried to go for the switch but all techpriest suddenly rose in uproar, lighting all available lights and aiming at me every available bulb in preparation to cleanse heretic daring to omit their stupid canticles of machine spirit . . . Father give me strength.

No amount of logic could persuade them to just try the button and I was forced to wait until whole procedure ended. Ehhhhhhhhhhhhhhh . . . I could just brute force it, but still, it was better to have them on my side for time being. During that time, one of techpriest was tasked to watch over us and our needs. Taking advantage of the occasion, I asked artisian to upgrade PDA I received on ship, but she didn't understand what was to "upgrade", since it "worked perfectly". Explaining to techpriest what does it mean to replace low powered comm relay capacitor for more efficient, high powered energy cell, shouldn't be so hard. He "alarmed" Schootex for daring to question sanctified schematics. In short conversation that followed, techpriest was sent to help with ceremony, while fabricator took a look at my device. Being aware of limitations STC imposed over personal communicators, concluded that it would be too great strain for electronics and it would require additional work. Without word of approval or moment of thought, he just took it to their mobile workbench and spent next 30 minutes tinkering with device, changing it to bloated and heavy multi task instrument. I appreciated additional capabilities, but . . . it was hard to fit in a pocket after that. When he heard my complain . . . just made me belt case for it. Can't say I wasn't impressed with what he could do on the fly, without whole workshop.

	Cannon Heavy Macro cannon
	Manufacturer Forgeworld Lokinyth
	Dimension 49.6m x 44.3m x 357.6m
	Ship Basket of Thorns
	Fire Rate 320 seconds
	Shell Capacity Subcaliber Heavy Macro cannon shells
	Heavy Macro cannon shells
	Exterminatus Class shells
Firing Technology	Combustion Assisted
	Electromagnetic rail discharge



— Arrival Day [155] — Pursuit day [141] — Day of reign [110] —

I spent next 30 hours sitting over lava lake, playing cards with Ghost. Nothing we could do about it. But . . . There is always a but. Ceremony failed. Schootex could not understand why gate wouldn't open, when they followed whole procedure to the letter. I asked him to show me procedure rites. Among dozens of canticles of machine spirit, scroll of unsealing inquisitorial vault missed one very important thing. Most important. Pulling a fucking leaver behind closed panel on left side of the frame in order to release hydraulic pump brakes.

We saw it. They did as well. But, for fuck sake, never thought to use it since "it was not in the procedure". So I asked him if this leaver had to do anything at all with opening gate, but he denied such possibility ever occurring. He couldn't be wrong following instructions of fabricator who built it in first place . . . yeah . . . I diligently laid book back on the pedestal and facepalmed. When his fellows gathered to discuss problem, I just walked to the damn gate, ripped closed panel open and pulled switch down, releasing vault clamps. They already came back, all intrigued if machine spirit has awoken. There is only so much idiocy I could take. After locking mechanism has been released, I used commanding console to input opening sequence.

They were . . . well . . . threatened to think I was smarter then their schematics and very delicately suggested I must be a heretek to rouse machine spirit without proper ceremony. You can imagine in what kind of VERY low esteem I regarded his entourage. Fortunately, Schootex had more oil in his brain. He sent everyone in upfront to map all insides without disrupting repository and asked me to stay behind to let them do their work first. Once we were unhindered by prejudice of small minded, he confessed to me that he has to keep appearances in front of cult, less he will himself be branded as heretek for knowledge which shouldn't exist. Assured me that our deal still stood, but to ease search for knowledge, I had to allow his men to do their duties first. He insisted we rest a bit more in meantime. Instead of resting, I asked him to teach me what did he actually do with the device, and how it worked.

This . . . gizmo, constructed by someone as skilled as fabricator general couldn't be simple. Since he knew about what kinds of danger I would be facing, contraption came with included gravi radar technology, allowing holo display to show my surroundings in real time, its little particle accelerator allowed to scan 20 meter radius with increased falloff, even through walls. We went through demonstration inside vault corridor. That was impressive. In addition, PDA had now electronium gel capacitor array, sending radio signals in range of 600 miles. As it was not enough, oculus aparatus has been upgraded with multi spectrometer for finding disruptions of warp weave conduit and super spectral subroutines for thermal, infrared or ultraviolet detection, adjusted for proper color display on holofield. It also included superframe video recorder, cipher breaker, code analyzer and all known language translating libraries. The only drawback is its 4 time increased size.

Once we finished lesson, he decided it still lacked manual display. After another 30 minutes on the bench, came back with nice, scratch proof, hardened crystalglass, 3 inch manual monitor as side attachment. Later Ghost had his rifle



serviced, sanctified and upgraded for increased coil discharge bay, suitable for concentrated capacitor packs. From simple bullet spewer to laser cannon. Perhaps not suitable for stealth actions, but it packed a punch when we tested it on rocks. Not yet a lascannon, but still.

And so we waited another 26 hours until everything has been cataloged. We peaked from time to time inside, just to see hordes of skulls and drones flying around servitors. Once Magos' finished, fabricator sent me all data they gathered available for peruse in my new gadget. We were given skull servitor for personal assistance.

Since ghost didn't even know what we were searching for, not even Schootex did, honors of finding most interesting script befallen upon me. I went inside, to see for myself how it looked. In tall corridor, vault ceilings still bore colorful paint of Emperor standing before heavenly gates. After first chamber, which looked like reception room, tall, steel doors remained open on lengthy library. Windowed, steel bookcases stretched from floor to ceiling along whole length of walls. Central repository was the very long. As long as voidship spinal corridors. Now illuminated by whole power of multitude of light fixtures from floor and ceiling, gave impression as lit by direct sunlight. In center of corridor, data repository banks were surrounded by reading tables made out of grey stone. Bodies of sororitas have been already put in metal coffins, in middle of main chamber, with stone pedestal built in their memory. Plaque with their names carved for honoring their servitude to the Emperor. Servitors, kept of moving stacks of books, cases and artifacts from tables to appropriate places in displays. Servo skulls scanned library. Techpriests cataloged book after book, pulling it from behind glass and laying on recording tables with frightening speed. Judging height servos brought tomes from, they already finished about 80%.

While Ghost searched for anything concerning last inquisitorial crusade from M36, I went to see black grimoire. That door wasn't opened. Checking database brought no guidelines as to how to open it. I remembered clearly where Kaifas said he left both keys. At least I thought I did because they were missing. Going from techpriest to techpriest nobody could tell what happened to them. Three fellows who worked in headmistress' chamber never seen it. You can image how my blood became boiling and angry. We had to bring this issue to Schootex. I had to interrupt his exploration of reliquary and took him outside to discuss our trouble. To him, if opening the vault was everything we wanted, that could be done with their tools, but missing cipher keys was concerning even to him.

We rushed to open the lock. He himself tried to use all tools at his disposal to search for keys, sending all his machinery in pursuit, but . . . no luck. In the end, he used saws and plasma blades to root out door's hinges from wall. Within . . . no book. Imagine my dread. Ghost cursed blossomy motherlover responsible for it. Schootex understood serious weight of this sacrilege and potential aftermath. For moment, we all stood like frozen, wondering what happened to the artifact. I asked him to make use of his instruments, while I focused on it's residual energy. Sitting on seriously desolated bed of whoever slept there thousands of years ago, I did my best to reach out into immaterial waves of time space energy to envision history of the place, with enough effort to shine like lamp from every corner of my astral existence. After few minutes I finally caught spectral scent of . . . how to say it . . . a timeline?

In my mind, whole history rolled in quick succession, like pict's on a



rolltape. From very ancient times, when sisters were tasked in guarding this most holy place from plundering of any unwelcome guest, through millennia on inertia, until recent weeks when Kaifas disturbed vault. I felt how he touched grimoire. I saw how he was spooked by what looked like, giant cloud of flaming thorns stretching over horizon. The same spirit energy of released entity, but just part of it. Then, as with click of a button, slideshow of what happened recently, yesterday. I mean . . . you know. As 3 techpriests and their servitors surveyed chamber, one of them waited for room to empty and opened vault without anyone's knowledge, snatched the book and closed it, hiding cipher keys inside chest augmentations of their servitor.

After returning to reality, I related everything to Schootex already standing over me with set of holographic instruments researching my presence in warp. We found culprit in just 15 minutes, recovering keys in process. His acolyte wouldn't want to cooperate, which forced Magos to resort to more . . . extreme measures. But before they took him away, I used my powers to search in his memory what happened to grimoire. Unfortunately, due to extent of his cybernetization, there wasn't much of a soul to hang on to. Most protected memory he hid, was of robed person hiring him to assassinate new fabricator over promises of heretek technology access. This gave Schootex even more incentive for interrogation. Everything else laid outside my reach.

He was taken by his fellows while me and Ghost remained in vault chamber. Acolyte screamed in monstrous yells of pain loud enough to make it to us. During his processing, magos decided he would not even be servitorized. Instead was dissected for parts and whatever left burned for this treachery. They were able to recover internal data storage device and extract information. Schootex, wise enough to be aware such attempts would be inevitable, didn't see it coming from his own acolytes. To clear rest from any suspicion, everyone had to gather at main terminal, connect to noosphere and share their databanks to prove loyalty.

In meantime, we focused efforts on finding this book. I searched traces of energies still lingering around while Ghost operated my...PDA? I guess it still classified as PDA. We found it in one of sister's casket. Actually a clever place to hide something, but not something of such vile nature.

Even just by looking at it, grimoire called to both of us with wicked desire to posses. Ghost, not having experience with Haemonculi artifacts, stretched his hand to grab it, making me restrain him in struggle. It took a good slam on face, but he calmed down. Apologized in deep breaths, not knowing what came over him. I elucidated his ignorance over such unholy items. Once first stages of handling faded, we sent servo skull to pick it up. It struggled due to weight of tome, but was able to float.

At first, everything proceeded smoothly. Ghost, even standing few meters away, still couldn't quell voice inside his head. Due to his throughout training, he was aware of those feeling within, which forced him to back out of chamber. Even one glance at it made him want to kill me for denying it's touch. We agreed to setup failsafe mechanism just in case same happened to me. While I read it, he would monitor me via skull servitor and act had something disturbing happened. Of course, I left him with list of situations deleterious to others, but fine for me, so there would be no false alarms.

Proximity of grimoire had no effect on me. Yes, I did feel its dark presence



from up close, but voices, corollary of its original energies, talked too stupid shit to take it seriously. Their “whispers” seemed like joke to me, constantly bombarding person with petty desires, trying to displace its source connection, trying to slither warp energies into victim. It actually made them even more agitated, to have no effect on me. Stupid astral parasite never learn a thing.

I confirmed to Ghost my attempt of tracing these energies and dived into warp. As soon as I emerged in immaterium, net of blades stricken my spirit body. It hurt like hell, but such things are easily disposed of, and most importantly, it happened in my mind, my most strongest suit. Conjuring sphere of light effectively dissipated darkness around, securing nearby time-space nexus from any unwanted influence. With few next touches of brilliant, golden light, I exorcised substance of the book to be safe to handle. Safer. At least for me. Due to it's intricate nature there was no permanent cure for that powers embedded within it. Except for total annihilation.

Resistance of thing within was strong enough to make me dizzy out of effort, but enabled Ghost being able to walk around object without fear of loosing his mind. Asked what was that light shining out from my palm during cleansing. I explained what happened on the other side and how it had its own direct manifestation in physical world.

After short break, we studied it at altar of the Emperor, inside chapel. It actually help a little bit to stabilize surrounding energies with all that sanctified holiness around. But mostly gold.

My companion had multiple reservations about looking inside. Baggage of experiences told him he wasn't fit for this kind of work and left me alone, trusting in my “divine” powers.

Right. For starters, I had drone take pictures of book and record everything.

Ahhh . . . Opening of grimoire felt . . . wrong. Very wrong. Something inside told me I didn't want to know, but I squandered those feelings. First page, then second, then third. Just as Kaifas showed us. First chapter contained knowledge of soul binding and harvesting. Second described rituals of engraving spirit into other bodies or useful constructs. Third chapter filled with instructions how to build such vessels and which parts to use.

Fourth and most spacious. More voluminous than all other combined, explained what is nature of spirit vessel, what is soul matrix, how is soul matrix created in physical body. How astral body connects to physical form. What is process of incarnation. Why spirit stone works and why Eldar did not actually need it in order to escape thirst of their nemesis. Almost 300 hundred pages of pure, undiluted by fancy words, dry knowledge. So much contained in just one book. At the end, there was even entry of underlying mechanics of psyker potential, and almost mechanical methods of increasing psychic potency. Author described egregorial manifestation of warp entities as well as nature of chaos. First time in my life I have ever seen someone explaining mechanics of existence of chaos gods. It was not just study of immaterium, but whole description of it's nature.

For example, why chaos drives souls mad. What I read stated, that it happens due to disruptions of soul's connection to their primordial energies of creation. It spoke of other layers of existence. Just like there were multiple dimensions between realspace and warp, which Eldar used, so there are multiple



outside them.

It even touched upon existence of space called “deep warp”. A place where all, even ravenous entities of immaterium met their cosmic demise, returning to source as spiritual dust.

Author knew about Necrontyr and war in heaven. It was written, that even C'tan were entities of higher dimensions which sunk into realspace due to their heavy and dense energetic composition.

That is where . . . my other self burned up in rage. As never before, he lashed out in display of displeasure and rage. So I read further. Few pointers toward nature of C'tan and possible solutions of their containment, not yet tested, only theorized.

And that was on the top of binding techniques and mechanisms of immaterial entities within 3 dimensional space. Reference to Necron labyrinth stones, technology behind it's workings and most of all – nature of C'tan shards . . . Why have cosmic entity of such immense power fractured into holographicly fractal, self contained systems of independent existence, containing same consciousness in thousand pieces.

At the end, there was even mention about primordial mechanics of manifestation, allowing multidimensional energies of unified field to manifest in seemingly substantial, dimensional way and energy systems taking shapes, resulting in creation of infinite gradient of dimensions existing at the same time-space nexus in one place.

Whoever compiled such knowledge had to be master of their trade. Not just a Haemonculi. Person of more than knowledge, wisdom or understanding. Perhaps ancient enough to remember fall of Eldars, but . . . old fashioned to write it . . . in a book.

But this is where I had to stop studying, as headache grew into gargantuan proportion, toppling me down to ground in groan of pain. Schootex instantly closed book and sent for Ghost. He came rushing in and helped me to get out of chamber. Pain subsided second by second after we increased distance. My eyes drew blood. Just like my nose. That thing . . . caused some damage to me just to make me stop. I had an idea what it was about, but there was no way to say for sure.

So happened, that techpriest already finished their checkup and waited for me to finish, watching remote video feed. Magos biologis took me outside and administered some kind of injection into arm. Headache subsided in time, allowing me to fall asleep.



— Arrival Day [156] — Pursuit day [142] — Day of reign [110] —

I woke up when time dial indicated next solar day, all fine, except for sore muscles maybe. Nobody outside vault indicated very long and arduous work underwent in full bloom.

Strangely, it was closed. More over, I couldn't feel human presence inside. Instead I felt warp entities. Switch didn't react. Same for leaver. The longer I stood in front of door, the more chilly whispers of unknown language buried deep into my mind. Something was wrong. Who could have foresee it . . . Techpriests played with toy they shouldn't, yet again and it blew in their faces. Ghost didn't answer calls either. My only option was to open it myself, but knowing that there was something inside, probably feasting upon their carcasses, had me doubt validity of such decision. Before making hasty action, some recon was in order. Whatever happened since yesterday could wait another few minutes as I surveyed astral realm.

Few shadowy figures as seen through fog. This “fog” obscured my sight enough to disable my spirit sensations. Dark, thick, slime like, black goo seem to stuck to my astral body. Very unpleasant feeling. A . . . flexible shards of black glass, sharp and pointy in every direction filling space within. I managed to walk through it, but this was no shell, more like pool. Trying to go deeper felt like cutting through thorns. Something sat there, but I didn't see what. Once I confirmed situation, there was nothing left, but to forcefully open crypt. Since I knew its mechanism, rolling wings aside ended up being relatively easy. After all, tiny slit was all I needed to get in.

Physical space inside remained fine. No warp bleeding through, no demons or monsters, no twisting of realspace. Four priests laying on the floor in first chamber drooped with instruments in hand. I could read results in display just as they were few hours before, scanning for warp intrusion patterns. Their souls sucked out into this darkness. In main library, servitors stood all ready for service, servo skulls still floated midair awaiting instructions, but everyone else was dead. Schootex and Ghost included. Whatever killed them, whispered to me some things I didn't understand, neither could I pinpoint its location.

A: No. he was quiet.

A: Well, since there was no immediate thereat, and even if there was, he wouldn't do a damn thing unless it meant being stuck in void for whole eternity.

A: But he did something. To me it seemed he . . . tasted this . . . energy, darkness, whatever it was, he gladly licked it like ice cream. That's how I knew it was . . . relatively “safe” for me to roam.

My first guess was that they tried to use black grimoire to summon something. I searched for my servo skull and played back events of few hours before. Just as I imagined, Schootex and his buddies tried to decipher meanings of written words, but did so speaking them out loud to Eldar lexicon translator system. How little did they knew they just invoked a fractal pass to black entity



of warp, painting their selves as recipients of its power. And sacrifice at the same time. Tough luck. Now it befall onto me to close this fracture.

I looked at grimoire and found invocation they spoke out. Section 1, page 82, embedding warp entity into physical vessel, practical incantation of evoking warp power. That thing really didn't like what I tried to do and bombarded me with astral, thorny lashes. It didn't take much to persuade me, so I just grabbed damn tome and run out, closing library. Outside vault, its influence drastically lessened. It took me hour to find proper banishment evocation. All I had to do was to destroy its vessel to cut off its link to physical realm. That was the problem. What was the thing it bounded to. Going through data feed, two things came to my attention. The servo skull which served as mobile pedestal or cogitator machine used for translation. I smashed both but it didn't work. I could just level whole vault, but this was very, very unlikely to provide benefit, especially when this thing couldn't move around. I tried many options, until it narrowed down to corpses. There was one good way of disposing them – throw into lava. Entity knew my intention. It used every power in its arsenal to keep me out of its area of influence, however up to its dissatisfaction, I already adjusted my astral self to its power with shield it couldn't penetrate. With servo skull documenting my every move, I gave all bodies proper burial in name of Machine God, read them a canticles, funeral rite and threw corpses one by one into lava lake. It worked. Darkness engulfing surrounding astral space dissipated like mist on a wind in few minutes. Silence in ether returned.

A: No, I have no idea what this entity was. It had hallmark of warp entity, but very different from all demons or aetheric constructs I met before.

A: There was no helping dead people. All I could do is offer them prayers, even if I don't practice religion.

A: I haven't check that. There could be alarm triggered somewhere, perhaps help was on its way, but I had no idea where to look for it.

Knowledge of what was at stake helped to clear out my consciousness. I Had grimoire, now I had to find diaries of inquisitor, possible of Mara, to find a way to seal this monstrosity as it was before. Thanks to vault catalog, combined with efforts of Mechanicus to stamp every book, I had access to almost all entries and relics. Diaries of Hulak ab Ka'el Mador were 100% archived. For next two standard days, I binged on his works.



— Arrival Day [158] — Pursuit day [142] — Day of reign [110] —

From what was written in his books, they never sealed demon, but renown its seal, after exterminating Jundak xeno population of system ILU-2, who resided on planet at this time to prevent any tinkering with seal. After 60 years of crusading against local civilizations in sector designated as [SO/21299/13-173/63] they finally found source of the wicked power of local species. With few mentions of how Vandire's folly almost toppled Imperium, he praised his creation of Adepta Sororitas. Most of all, the canonesse of Order of Bloody Rose, Mara Marianna Tumesku, who has been indestructible bulwark of faith. Thanks to sisterhood, there was no need to call upon Space Marine chapters to deal with danger. Once everything settled, he created new order, Of Laurel Crown, designating Mara as its one and only prioress. Even he himself knew dangers of such play, but at the edge of galaxy nobody would care. Most of all, sisterhood was established to keep danger at bay at all times, piously spreading Imperial faith.

They managed to destroy Jundak settlement, built as a refuge at ancient, Eldar tomb site. Xenos worshiped being imprisoned within its crystal lattice construction deep under surface. After close study of nature of its prison, they decided to leave it intact and bury further, creating new mountain of dirt and stone to cover whole complex, never to be seen again. His diary never mentioned designation of this entity, as even Eldar descriptions did not dare to mention it. Few instructions of its creation have faded with time or they simply couldn't read their lexicon right.

In process, they found grimoire which xenos used as holy book to communicate with their deity and created vault to keep it out of anyone's hands, once and for all. Hulak, being pragmatic first, would not let its knowledge go to waste however. In his second work, he admitted to be corrupted by knowledge found within and left inquisition as pariah, searching for ways to make his work viable for Imperium's use. He copied black tome with his own hands, and destroyed original. Few last pages of that book promised whoever touched it, to be purified from evil. Of course there were warnings of its use, and most of all, pointers how to use it. He referred to yet another book of his research, in which he described results of experiments.

That one was not yet cataloged in archives, so I had to search for it the hard way. Just looking for it took four hours, but it was all worth it. His work "Of Movement Between Planar Layers Of Existence" contained extrapolation upon grimoire's dry information, putting it into context. This volume was big enough to fill half desk in head mistress office. And heavy. Reading through it would take me whole weeks, so I went directly to results of his work.

In there, whole methodological process was explained. Every apparatus, even heretek designs and innovation of technology available by employing principles within tome. Some done on his own body, but major share on others, especially procedures including invocation of demons. I don't know what I was searching for exactly, but flipped page after page, learning perhaps a third of its information.

Inquisitor tested theory in practice, validating every passage he used from tome. Up to his disappointment, all of experiments have been designed as purely



evil, to feed warp entities with most despicable suffering available. Any attempt to leverage it against chaos only ended up feeding it more. However there was ONE exception. That is binding one's soul to new container, which Haemoculi used to bring back their deceased people. Following its trail, he found way to eternally prolong one's life by growing perfect copy of his body and transferring his very soul into new vessel by using power of the warp. He found out, that slight deviations in flesh are tolerable, but most faithful copies provide best outcomes during process. There was even possibility of upgrading one's body in this process, if soul is resilient enough to withstand re-engineering, as soul matrix is being disturbed during process of gestation. Not every soul wishes to bear this uncomfortable time and prefers to disconnect, leading to death.

Last, but not least, in his old days, he tried to "help" Eldar from being consumed by Slaanesh. In his own mind, it was better to help xeno than to feed chaos. This however wasn't as much as physical process, but psychological one, due to their nature. Their minds were able to mold energies of immaterium, drawing them into physical space, so by slight adjustment in their bodies, their minds were able to free themselves from energetic leash of black god. He found only few who volunteered, as such even fewerr of them exist, but they do exist. At least existed. In return, they shared more insights about black grimoire, helping to solidify his understanding even more. His greatest creations wouldn't come to pass, as he chose to not prolong his life, dying with dignity in Emperor's grace.

I read some random passages on other pages, but nothing picked my interest. On my way out, packed those two diaries and grabbed some more random tomes from random shelves, as much as could fit my backpack, and . . . took grimoire with me. Returned all servitors into main chamber to stand guard beside sisters' graves, downloaded data from servo skulls onto my PDA, closed vault and turned off generator. Now it was time to climb up to the surface. Explaining what happened would be a pain in the ass.

Having lots of time, wondering through underground labyrinth, helped me to think of possible scenarios when it came to direct confrontation with mechanicus or sororitas, not to mentioning inquisition. That part, I had simulated from every angle. Can't remember how long journey took, but it tired me out.

Loud noises of machines signified reaching depths of manufactorum. Lowest parts of gigantic facility were largely unused, ready for storage of some kind. Massive holes, carved around natural caverns, reinforced with girders, transporting rigs and dozens of dumping pipes. The only thing I could see on the bottom of this chasm, were glimmers of dark stones, probably ores, illuminated by floodlights on catwalks.

Fortunately, those levels weren't staffed even with servitors or sentry guns. Unfortunately, I had to open low level security gate, but had no clearance. Cogitator assistant denied me entry, but didn't sound any alarm. Few positioning lights over pipelines guided my attention to some kinds of tubes. I flew towards ceiling in order to search for vents. I got through with ease into main shaft. Flying all the way to the top would be very difficult with all those fan blades spinning, so I explored side corridors on foot. I found big ass ramp spiraling kilometers up around supply platform, in hollowed out stone shaft. Considering stealth as my main objective, I left lift alone and climbed spiral catwalks to the top and . . . I suppose there shouldn't be any whining on my part, but damn, it 2 hours of walking upwards.



When finally on top, I used refractor field taken from Ghost for camouflage, but couldn't be sure if system would pick me via infrared cameras. All I could do was hope. At this point, getting out quietly became priority at all costs. Reaching docks, secondary.

In the end, my path forward proceeded smoothly. It took stepping through industrial waste plants and sewage canals, but in the end, I made it to main levels of Temple Mechanicus. Little by little, started to see real people at work. And finally some lights. I ended up sneaking out through waste disposal unit in recycle plant near surface. Once inside, security forces detected me and chased in order to detain me for processing, but . . . that wasn't happening. I jumped over servitors, few catwalks and run away. Drones sent in pursuit were very easy to destroy.

Problem was, I run towards the opposite way to shipyard. Instead of just few stops from it, that place was located in eastern cauldron segment. That's why you waited so long.

Dragging my whole backpack through manufactorum was straining indeed. Had anyone actually saw what I hauled in backpack, and after what I did, there would be hell to pay. It wasn't a reason for pride.

In one of back alleys in lower levels of housing district, I managed to obtain worker pass to use rail system for transportation. Not much to say. Someone was killed and tossed in dumpster. I'm sure not even mechanicus notices small amount of missing workforce. After period of starvation, hive became increasingly dangerous survival ground. I just hoped our fleet could quickly restore proper food rations. I did everything in power to make it happen. Nevertheless, gangs remain gangs, even in manufactorum. Walking around in fancy helmet would surely turn heads so I hid it and put on hood, trying to save battery on refractor device.

There was no time to adore huge spires, massive metal hubs and giant, rockcrete living hubs. More wealthy districts even had trees planted on the street. Few colors, over monumental bridge overpasses, rusted away in darkness. I visited forgeworld many times, but never as tourist.

Watching how mechanical welter of motion drove planet from up close, certainly looked like a miracle. Massive haulers, cohorts of skitarii and hordes of legio cybernetica patrolling main segments, workers augmented beyond human limits, even cybernetized pets walking on the street. But there was no music. No laughter. Not even homelessness. I could even surmise, not even life. Everything run like machine. Efficient like machine. Rigid like machine.

Well, I finally reached main transitory station within temple around 17 hours local, but it took like another hour to figure out which train I had to take. On top of that, clearance from that worker wasn't designated for outside travel. There were brokers for faux passes, but it looked like boarding without pass was safer than dealing with them.

From windows of my train transport, whole megalopolis looked . . . alike. Each part constructed in same way, purposeful, devoid of any character. Even train going 500 miles per hour couldn't hide how sad and bleak this world looked like. Bleak like future of whole sector if we didn't destroy chaos cult. I bet there were some cells right beneath my feet, crawling in deepest dungeons, biding their time.



But all of it faded away once I reached shipyard pier 13. Mass of cybernetized people walked out in unity, to spill over arrival platform plaza.

Half an hour later, I finally arrived at dock 26. Basket Of Thorns anchored in dry dock. Biggest ship currently on planet. Worked on by army of small points all over its hull. Huge grav platforms and cranes provided massive plating refurbishment for its hull and missing décor. Lines of cargo trucks delivered supplies on bottom of the dock, half mile down. Majestic port side cannons and enormous crane stretching its reach over horizon One and only such construction in whole sector, capable of dry dock servicing huge voidships. Jet platforms flying all over hull, reinforcing any missing windows and repairing surface damage. Some kind of procession walking around ship, holding banner of the order on front. Fortunately, they were on the opposite side to embarking platform, in process of blessing huge welding machine used for bulkhead chunks.

I couldn't see much of what was going on near main boarding bridge due to amount of stacked containers, but even so, there was no mistaking peculiar feeling of silenced warp. Even from 2 kilometers. I know this black hole of stillness too well to mistake it for anything else. Before approaching ship, I hid in one of empty containers to see what was going on via remote viewing. Unfortunately, due to presence of this null field, I couldn't see too much. Any life force blended with tens of thousands of others. It didn't bode well, that much was obvious. At first, I wanted to run away, wait and see how situation develops, but . . . I was also very tired, eager to finally dump cargo off my back, in preferably safe place.

Even through half way nothing piqued my curiosity. Actually, all the way down the pier, I noticed nothing or no one watching me. Once I did . . . it was already too late. Fending off this null field captured all my attention.

A: Actually there are more sources of null than what you call blanks. I knew inquisitor was coming aboard black ship, but wouldn't imagine he'd haul them just to get me. If anything, I imagined quick orbital bombardment.

A: Like I care what your instruments showed. It doesn't change reality.

A: Sure.....ehhhhhhhhhhhh You already saw I am not psyker like you ever met. Alright, maybe not yet then, but now you know.

A: There is footage and reports, they don't need to hear it, they can read it. Or see it.

A: Nah . . . if you brought Custodes instead, then maybe. But even Grey Knights wouldn't be able to restrain me. Maybe in tesseract prison, but I'm quite sure they wouldn't waste it on me.

Sisters guarding perimeter let me through without trouble and notified command of my arrival. Nobody escorted me. It was as bad as it was good. Presumably Janna anticipated what I could carry on me and decided to minimize possible exposure. But this looming, astral negation kept on telling me something was wrong. There is never a random null field appearing in real world just like that.

Boarding ramp checkpoint was busy as always. I had to wait in line, letting



cargo trucks through before security allowed me to approach departure gate. Sister on duty took a long and good look at me, glancing at monitor in front of her. I had to take off my hood and use palm reader to prove my identity. Further validation had to be done with voice recognition and later by blood sample. Now I know she intentionally dragged it out, cutting me out when someone else appeared. It felt wrong. Very wrong. Everyone on the ship knew me. I even saw those sisters few times before. It wasn't just by chance they held me back.

By the time I looked around out of window, whole loading square became empty. Even trucks were no more. Then, an alarm siren scattered drones and jet platforms working around port side. Instead, well . . . whole damn army begun to run on storage pier. Probably thousands of guardsmen and every battle sister on planet. Even legio cybernetica, dunecrawlers, chimeras, sentinels, and servitors rounded up over storage park. Workers were nowhere to be seen. Servitors aimed their weapons at me already. Circle was closing in. Security booth closed down all door and checkpoint vacated instantly. Guarding sentries run towards incoming commandery of sisters from vessel with Janna at the front. As if that wasn't enough, null field started to move, heading this way in very rapid tempo. There was no mistake to what was happening. Somebody wanted me dead. Judging from actors in play, I could surmise only one person capable of pulling it off. Running away wouldn't resolve anything, just drag on the inevitable. I might have been fatigued but not weak enough to walk out through stone walls. My stomach rolled over when I took a better look outside. It looked like whole garrison rushed to form a battle line. Vox casting system of docks announced red alarm and emergency evacuation, while sister contingent yelled through vox amplifiers, demanding me to drop weapons and surrender. I didn't even notice that aircraft closed on me until roars of its engine hovered over me.

Valkyrie landed twenty meters away from me, inciting dust cloud over rockcrete shelf. Even before it touched down, Inquisitor Hakobyan jumped out from quite high, crushing pavement under weight of his artificer armor. Yeah, that was just a show off. Red cloak embroidered with inquisitorial insignia. Giant power sword in one hand, and storm bolter over other. Gleaming with adamantium silver plates, and ordo hereticus rosette on shoulder pad. Even before I saw book hung by chain over his shoulder, my stomach rolled inside out again, almost vomiting. Field of stillness induced in me great discomfort, but up to his surprise, not enough to throw me into despair. He himself wore psychic hood, so I can't say what was he thinking bringing two sources of null with him.

Just as he landed tall and proud, two sisters of silence took their place in front of him. Silent sisters came to acquisition me for their black ship . . . Or so I thought.

Valkyrie left when forces finally took their places at storage terraces, not far from us, avoiding direct line of fire over inquisitor. Inquisitor gestured to valkyrie something and alarm fell silent. I heard hundreds of cuffed stilettos coming behind me at boarding ramp.

Nonetheless, venerable Tigran . . .

Yeah, Yeah. Inquisitor begun to spin his opulent manner of speech, fancy decor with plentiful flowery uptakes in high gothic dialect. His voice, not even amplified, was loud enough without yelling.

At first, he courteously welcomed me after "such long time of absence". He



was, oh so disappointed I put our meeting in abeyance for so long. And so obnoxiously full of himself, he couldn't stop grinning banana from ear to ear.

Oh yes you did!

Ehhhhhhhhhhhhh . . . He heard I obtained something very valuable for him, and proposed to trade whatever was left of my life for his item. I knew worse threats than this, but there was no telling if he even knew what was this item from vault, so I asked if he even had an idea.

This struck him very angry, to know audacious filth had nerve to question him. Even amid whole army, he didn't hesitate to proclaim I found most heretical scripture of death. It pained him to hear he missed the mark. I tried to reach backpack in order to show him one of other books, but he demanded to hold my hand where he could see them. I tried to tell him I wasn't his enemy and would gladly give all my findings, since my goal aligned with Imperium's well being. For moment, he considered, but then ordered me to pull everything out from that backpack. Just in time for Janna with her sisters to reach ramp gate. I tried to look for her gaze, but she looked past me, intentionally not meeting my eyes.

Before reaching for backpack, I asked him to reconsider showing such item in front of so many people. This gave him idea that if I really knew what I found, there would be warranted repercussions for hiding truth in front of inquisition. No matter how you looked at it, he just wanted excuse to purge me.

Slowly, I dropped backpack on ground in manner not pointing to how many items it held. At first, I pulled out random book I found on shelf. His eyes could not read front cover from such distance, but he caught up it was just pathetic switchover. And petty thievery on my part. His smile returned and once again demanded to see what I "stole from him". To drag this farce long enough to ascertain situation, I showed every book one after another. Even diaries of inquisitor Hulak didn't impress him.

A: Oh yes, you did!

A: Really? It's already on vids and pics from everyone.

A: Well then, your own helmet has . . .

A: Yes, it does matter, because he will once again search for excuses. I don't care for your respect or disrespect. I care about facts.

Only when I finally pulled out black grimoire his eyes lit in desperate desire of possession. He immediately ordered Sisters of Silence to recover it.

With no hesitation, both of them rushed with their blades drawn. I . . . didn't want to make a scene but my own fate was on the line so . . . I dropped grimoire on ground and froze them in mid air motion, focusing on it almost all my powers. They are fast and nimble, but not as much as succubus. Even so, one sister already held her sword in upperslice motion just a step away.

You can't imagine surprise on inquisitor's face. And everyone else. Even sororitas froze in motion seeing how I defied null maidens. Both girls swept their eyes in search for some elaborate trick around, but held steadily in character, I



give them that. Instead of surprise and shock, they tried to fight my force grip. Unfortunately . . .

A: Normally.

A: I told you already, my powers do not follow rules you are familiar with. Just like Father didn't . . .

A: And why the hell do you think He could use his powers in presence of whole damn order of null maidens. And why did He wear aurumite armor? Do you even know what properties it holds?

A: No, that is your bias and prejudice. Not suitable for soul progressed beyond time and space. Malcador, yes. But not Dad.

A: NO! For fucks sake, we never seen Him as deity, because we knew better. I understand why you worship Him as God, but that is only because you don't understand Him or his philosophies. Everything you heard about him, or at least 95% is total bullshit.

A: I do, but source of my power lies beyond simple warp or realspace. There is a reason why I wear gauntlets infused with noctilith.

A: Sure, alright, we can talk it over later.

Yes. Inquisitor didn't stay flabbergasted for long. Just few gasps later aimed and shot first bullet. I already saw it coming and managed to conjure sphere large enough to capture both sisters within. Then, everybody else started to empty their ammo reserves. Due to presence of sisters, my energetic pool I could draw from beyond, thawed drastically quick compared to normal situation. Since their presence cut off the warp, they cut off my replenishing medium.

I tried to yell to him, to at least try to understand we were not enemies, but he did not respond. We exchanged some glances with sisters, and I begged them to be reasonable and not fight, because we both follow Emperor's will.

Bullets came and came. In few seconds bolter fire stopped and only regular army weapons still remained in use. It didn't help. My power was depleting at geometrical rate so I had to do something.

In act of desperation, I extended grip towards Hakobyan. Due to already great strain, I was able to control only his pistol arm and rise it against his own will. Against head. Due to helmet, I couldn't see his face, but he watched his arm, trying to bring it down with the other one. Since he was psyker as well, cutting through his own defenses, directly through null field was very, very hard. Once his pistol almost reached height of head, he let out big yell to stop. In one moment, all guns silenced and I myself let go, feeling how great strain made my sight go dark.

His steady posture and self confidence waned as he shouted out phrases I won't repeat for . . . sake of his dignity. In very angry mode of yelling, he couldn't put elaborate words together, slurring most of time. After sisters were released, graciously landing before me, instantly jumped to me, putting blades over my neck and throat. Sororitas behind me started to gossip and stopped singing litanies, in great confusion of what happened. Inquisitor put himself together,



calmed down and spoke in his manner again.

First order directed all forces to rearm and hold their guns at ready. Second instructed sororitas to secure perimeter. Then, he called off silent sisters and walked to me, almost running. Damage I incurred was very obvious, as exhaustion almost knocked me over. yet he still swung his sword at me, but without intention of killing, so . . . I grabbed it in hands. Without moment to spare, damned me to hell, demanding to know what kind of monstrosity I have become using this forbidden magic.

Futile was explanation of how I didn't even have time to make use of it. He wasn't even listening, just pulled blade out of my hands and swung again, demanding penance, but one handed swing of such big sword was too heavy, striking with puny strength. I just ripped it out of his palm and threw behind. Once again, I told him I am not his enemy, that what I did was best for the Imperium, long before he ever been born. Due to visible burns my visage might have looked incredibly weakened, but Tigran seemed as well. Perhaps he was used to augmenting attacks with psyker's power, but not on such scale and not in near proximity of silent sisters.

Anyway, he finally took few seconds to think. Looked around and put away his pistol, like something was missing, even if black grimoire just laid plainly on ground right now. Janna was instructed to gather all tomes and lock them until further orders. Some commander in large detachment, was to embark on vessel and wait for further instructions. Sisters of silence were send along Janna to keep relics safe. Then, he just ordered me to follow him, as he "will know all my secrets soon enough".

He sent me first, trudging with his servitor squad few steps behind. Behind us, everyone crowded on the bridge. Once we stepped on ship, he called for Katarina to prepare interrogation chamber. This didn't bode well, but . . . well, I've been through worse and capable of knowing what kind of interviews inquisition like. There is always room to wiggle.

His servo skull directed me through corridors. Upon arrival, he dismissed all companions and had me enter room. Rooms similar to what we seen at High Command. Once he locked door and turned off interface, finally removed helmet. First time had I seen inquisitor so old. His wrinkles signified great age. Short, white hair and thick, gray beard. Yet despite years, keen sight of blue eyes still invoked respect on his face. After I stepped into spotlight, he begun to speak, walking around me.

Firstly, admitted he was full of anger and respect at the same time, to witness freak so out of existence, as to defy a null maiden. Few words of how he preferred to just erase me, but was aware enough to understand he couldn't overpower me even if it looked like I would collapse just by standing. His agents watched me closely from day I begun to decimate Crimson Raiders, documenting rise of very uncanny governor. He even went as far as to plant his spy in my government, after which he grandly recited revocation of my position and . . . death warrant. Fancy words of plenty extruded his speech by ten times necessary. Listening to his decorative speeches hurt my brain. I was already in a state of lowered perception and he made me wander off into stillness even more.

In the end, he wanted to know where does my power come from, so I told him the only way to know was to look into my own mind with his psychic powers.



At first he laughed at me, to even take into consideration that he would ever stain his soul with thoughts of a heretic. But, after I said I would tell him nothing, he seemed to reconsider. No threat worked on me. For moment silence fell over room. My legs started to give out, so I dropped to floor. After few more rounds of walking, he reached for helmet and spoke few words of his inquisitorial jargon to someone on the other side. In minute, few figures appeared in window of surveying room. Due to rough glass and light inside, there was no telling who arrived. Only black silhouettes.

Tigran stood over me, waiting for something. After one person knocked window four times, I was told to get up. We faced each other until he put arm on my shoulder and begun to dive into me.

Hakobyan saw everything that happened in vault. My adventure at ILU-2, Mara, ILU-7, days of wandering after Radiant Griffins chapter's needs, my time with Okis. He gasped over how easily we managed to exterminate Orks, but I prompted him to move back in time, as this was only the beginning. For moment, his mind wavered whether to pursue further, but I threw him deeper, to the source of my existence. My memories of previous inquisitorial encounters; Macragge, Armagedon, Grey Knights, Harrow Exodus, Legion of the Damned, Nova, Lorgar, Nemesis Titan, Stormwolf, Vandire and whole charade of his folly, Dominica and . . . the Emperor. For moment, he stopped to gaze at His visage, but I shoved him yet back again. For thousands of years of wars, voyage, roaming . . . a vagabond under oath to the very being he served so diligently. He saw how I communed with Father via psychic reach, sending me around galaxy into places no other could ever seen or witness. To destroy horrors of universe and in between time, spawned in most defiled places one could imagine. . . . My struggle against creatures of Immaterium and all its wickedness, supported by black shadow of immense power so great, as to make warp tremble to but hear its name. And I drowned him further, all the way down to my arrival at Eldar maiden world.

Isha'el of Erra, Lilaethan princess, my foster mother rising me, away from what happened at palace. Dreadful times of galactic schism and great cleansing. He almost broke down in fear and tears once I showed him golden palace. And underground laboratories. My place of birth. And seven years of upbringing in company of Custodes, his scientists, and retinue. Glory and ecstasy overcame his soul, when gazing upon immaculate image of Holy God Emperor. So much, that his physical body stopped all other functions than breathing. He saw how Father taught me in my room, how I drew pictures in his laboratory, how I was beaten down at training. How I spent two years of life in his company after he returned from crusade. All of it ended once he saw the one, REAL reason of my existence. Source of all darkness. Source of all power. From ecstasy, to horror. The very template I was created out of.

You wanted to know who was my mother . . . Well . . . there was no mother. I was born of Emperor, but without addition of external mitochondrial DNA. He . . . to create me . . . his . . . "angel of retribution" as he called me . . . capable of destroying chaos itself . . . used shard of Void Dragon to infuse me with powers of elder star gods. The Mag'ladroth reborn into new form . . . Part human, part C'tan. . .

Now you see . . . why I can't be so easily killed nor destroyed. And why my powers trespass beyond simple layers of reality. He saw . . . the link constraining both of our souls in this body . . . and even part of life contract with which Father



bonded me with him . . .

Inquisitor has been captive in fear of my other self for a moment, in which he tasted chilly touch of his ravenous gaze. In one moment, his pride, authority, status, wealth and life seemed so little and fleeting, staring at primordial power of creation. Or perhaps should I say destruction.

He tried to remove his hand from me, but fear paralyzed him so much he just froze in place, shivering with coldness of dark presence. In the end, I had to throw his hand off me. Immediately, he snapped back to reality, leaning backwards and almost falling down with legs half crouched, fumbling, ready to drop. Hands still shaking. Eyes wide open. Mouth stilled in silence. He didn't know should he kneel before me or shoot me dead on the spot. After few seconds, he seemed to take a kneel, but I called to him to stay straight and not do anything compromising my cover. He saw how many times I deleted Daemons from existence, just to vanish without a trace afterwards, following path of Father's will. It would do me no good to be treated as another holy ghost of their creed.

Hakobyan needed few minutes to put himself back into normal self, and somewhat apologized to me for ignorant and rude behavior towards me. Before we could get any further in his self-induced contempt, I asked him to treat me as he did before. It made my work all easier not to be bothered by public image. He only nodded. Took few more good visual measures of me and took up helmet, ordering to reopen doors and prepare us a dinner in his quarters.

On our way through ship, rows of sisters lined up to honor passing inquisitor, but weird gazes stuck to me from absolutely everyone. Just few moments ago I was the worst pariah, excommunicated and sentenced to death, while now . . . I walked hand in hand with inquisitor, cared for like living relic. When we walked out of dungeon level, he called over grav cart so we wouldn't walk through half of ship. When I took off my gauntlets to show him damage on my burnt hands, he immediately changed course for apothecarium. Truth is, I really needed the rest. Not only rest but very long rest.

Personnel thought I was still governor of Mara and treated me accordingly. Some had second thoughts, how and why inquisitor labeled me heretic, and now so closely helped. Nobody could tell what was happening. Even his entourage was confused about this decision. Hakobyan, however, stood as sure of his change of heart as his devotion to the Emperor, saying only that I indeed was most dedicated servant of the Emperor and my charges have been cleared. While surgeons helped to lessen pain of my arms, he officially reinstated me as governor of Mara.

Two hours later, we finally reached officer quarters. Large dinner consisting of many dishes already laid down on table in his room. Those were some very fine meals. Even better than what I had at governor's palace. He urged me to eat some, while techpriests helped to take his power armor off. Once ceremony ended, inquisitor asked out everyone but his two acolytes. Agent Natalie, girl who could override and access any cogitator system no matter of its complexity and agent Opek, who was a . . . typical big man with a big club, ordering lesser people around.

Tigran just sat in his chair, like his agents, and watched me slowly eating. Dead silence filled chamber. His aura seemed very conflicted. Two energy nexi swirled in opposite motions, creating doubt. After I finished, he invited me to office and presented my favorite desert. His words traced around my descent in



manner only I could recognize. We talked for few minutes about how I ended up in this place and time. With recent incident on ILU 2-2, his judgment told him this was my target even before he realized something like that was even imprisoned. This was the case. Any clues providing insight as to why Father guided my path here eluded me until that very day. And without Jana's over zealous behavior, this Daemon would be freed and invoked by chaos cultist anyway. Hakobyan told me his life's work consisted of eradicating daemons from our world, not bringing them back. It wasn't until four months ago, someone informed him of inquisitorial vault located in sector Mara, built after alleged purification of local stars from heresy over 6 millennia ago. He looked up history of this place and decided it was a good lead. Confessed that he didn't really know what this vault held, but knowledge locked within promised to be a great boon. It was only few days before Janna informed him of this artifact I spoke of. He never saw black grimoire before. Chaos books, unholy vespers, sure, but never Drukhari works, especially haemonculi experiments. She also informed him of sororita's past problems with Mendaz, sister's . . . origins and cloning operations. Everything.

At first, he really did not see how I could be uncorrupted, having not only power beyond imagination, but also knowledge beyond imagination. Whenever he saw yet another footage of my display of power, dreaded I would become huge demon portal. He heard about something helping in management of this power, from canoness, which sealed my fate. He even went silent, undercover, to lower my awareness, hunting my trail and alas we arrived at this mess. What happened in front of ship, had indeed been shocking for everyone. Especially him, since he could have not imagined how could a psyker be immune to pariah presence. It took few minute of explaining to him why "immune" is not the correct word. The thing about this . . . whole concept of my powers is not that . . . I am invulnerable to immaterium influence, just that its only a transitory dimension through which it has to . . . "travel", for lack of better words. So I am minimally affected by it, however on completely different premises. His acolytes couldn't accept that there was someone of my . . . peculiar affinity. Who as who, but inquisition knows how rare personnel is actually rare. After a while, a techpriestes came in with few servitors to perform further scans.

This time it couldn't be helped that she put some scanning devices on my hand and neck. To make sure I wasn't a bit tainted, they had to go through very rigorous process. Fortunately, it wasn't all that invasive and we still could speak. He wanted to know how I came in possession of knowledge about Eldar culture and most of all, how to read Drukhari lexicon cant. Despite being radically lenient . . . heh, maybe even very radically lenient, he would have never stoop so low as to use this unholy power, but still wanted to know what I actually found. Circumstances, however, weren't too salubrious for its disclosure so we had to finish procedures. To them, most important was stopping spread of chaos. In fire if needed. I said, that if he wanted tom make move, it would be reaching Shogo and wiping out cult before they can bring in demons. This, he already said was too late. His agents found sacrificial tombs all over Shogo. Thousands of people were being sacrificed every day out of public view. Seven of his henchmen already died uncovering cultists. Those two were all that left from his faithful companions.

I implied that exterminatus wasn't a good answer, over which he laughed and dismissed my worries as urban legends, because that is only a last resort, employed so rarely that most inquisitors do not even give such command during



their service. Sad was his face when I enumerated him all those instances I was involved with. As much he mourned those tragedies, he firmly stood, that there had to be no other way out for it to happen.

But there was concern about my "passenger". As much as he tried not to betray my past, he couldn't just kept curiosity away and asked how was I truly able to control such entity like . . . void dragon.

Truth is, at first, I myself had no idea, but in time, as I grew up, mother helped me to realize my potential as psyker. You can imagine explosion of emotions he displayed to know I was brought up by xenos. She, with help of seer council, found this thing dreaming in me after Father was already sanctified upon Golden Throne. With few vestiges of psychic communication we still had, he instructed me how to use and develop my powers beyond limit of warp. My training however, wasn't possible outside maiden world and . . . it wasn't fully realized. Exodites were as much marveled by my existence as were repugnant towards it. They knew dangers of star god and I was never taught to fully grasp strains of Mag'ladroth's vast power. Only those parts they deemed safe to use. Hence I do not create warp storms, summon giant fires from sky, or open dimensional tears. I learnt later, when visiting Father on few occasions, that my genetic code is in itself limited to prevent total takeover.

I mentioned to you, that DNA is antenna, receiving instructions from your own soul in astral realm. Had it been less fine tuned, my other self could forcefully take control. To prevent any possibility of his free manifestation, Emperor forcefully cut off certain rivers of energy flowing through my astral body capable of serving as piggyback for his consciousness, further curbing my . . . potential.

Even with all limitations in place, I was supposed to command more power than now. Because of my training with Eldar, my own astral body grew and solidified in patterns depending on warp, which inhibited flow of energy of higher realms, thus introducing great resistance to it's presence. By millennia of use, tolerance grew larger, but I still wasn't ever capable of commanding it like Father. Eternal hunger of C'tan never helped. Every time I did use those powers, he had to have part of it, taxing me even more.

Yes, I could call upon his infinite power, but it always came with caveat of mass sacrifice. He had to be fed. And he always knew how dire situations changed my point of view. After my first time, I vowed never to plunge thousands of souls into his maw again . . . Hmph . . . void are such vows, when facing daemon infestation or Tyranid invasion. Up till today, there were 74 times I willingly fed him souls to draw his power . . . millions . . . tallied after harvesting whole cities.

Of course, I didn't say it to Hakobyan, telling him only that IT wasn't source of my power, but I never learnt to properly "wield him". He accepted without further questions.

Soon after, delegation came in. Janna, Katarina, Lydia and other canonesses arrived to clarify situation. Tigran had to take them up, resulting in clash of characters between inquisitor and canoness superior. Firm sentence exchange and few in between lines accusations. His sudden change of mind about me brought up many questions. Everyone knew that there was something he saw within me, which not only absolved my "sins", but elevated me above all else. Sisters didn't know how to behave towards me or what was my status. They



demanded to set record straight and give them clear orders, because they weren't sure if this was his play, a bait or what else. He explained that his prejudice got better of him and clouded judgment when it came to my person and admitted that he saw my past in enough detail to understand my desire to keep my past in shadows. He returned to canoness her own words, saying about value of sister and told her to apply the same to me. I was called out from room to stand before them. There I saw Ada standing behind sisters, who took great deal of liking to her.

All their heads turned to me. Janna politely tried to ask time and time again to give them reasons, but Inquisitor adamantly refused to give details, repeating his usual statement, that I indeed am servant of the Emperor. Despite vivid distaste in their mouth, Janna accepted this order. But There was one more pressing matter to discuss, brought up by her own captain Katarina, which visibly startled Janna. Rumors of clone facilities supplying recruits into their ranks, and it was not something they could ignore. Everyone except Janna and Patricia demanded to know truth. With this, he turned to me, who has seen those facilities first hand. Canoness superior watched me very carefully, her lips moved in silence, giving me few "pointers" in way nobody noticed.

To avoid further confusion and possible break in ranks, I just repeated what she wanted, that "worth of every sister is determined by her devotion to the emperor not her past". And tossed in few bollocks about elite gene enhancement in plain training facility. This settled the matter, after which inquisitor ordered sisters to return to their posts and prepare for departure. He saw how my eyes followed Ada to the exit and called her over to stay for a chat. You can imagine how my happiness and confusion mixed in uncomfortable spiral of suspicions. Lydia said something to her, visibly encouraging to respond to Hakobyan. I asked him immediately what was he doing, to which he responded that "everybody needs a failsafe". It could have been, but only under condition of my willingness to cooperate and . . . well. I was.

We took a walk with Ada and his retinue, talking nobility like trash about unnecessary things all the way to the secured reliquary section. He excused himself with duties, proposing I take a walk with her, back to Germain.

We did. Perhaps with . . . less stiff atmosphere around us, talking how bizarre was to see her still on the ship. She told me how inquisition greeted them on their arrival station, and how inquisitor saw her as opportunity to make a move against me, because due to received reports, he thought we had something more going on than just acquaintance. This subject became . . . weighty and unfun. From one side, I didn't want to reject her outright, but my other self advised to leave her behind. Taking into consideration how rarely he directly communicated with me, it really sunk in gravity of situation, reminding me what kind of black hole pit whole sector found itself in. I knew he was right every time, but I just couldn't . . . you know. It was like my very dream came through . . . just to drop it into a garbage bin at first occasion . . .

For once, I enjoyed our time together, taking the long way to diplomatic quarters, trying to savor this little time we had. Yet . . . I couldn't shake off conflict in my mind.

Upon reaching their living quarters, using my health issues as shield, I excused myself to apothecarium before we made any real goodbyes. I headed to medical bay. A place nobody would bother me. Save for my own thoughts.



When I got up next morning, guarding sisters handed me letter from inquisitor. He left for black ship, to gather appropriate forces from nearby systems to confront fleet at Shogo. Asked me to wait for little longer, until we could make a move and properly heal up before encounter. Already lifted order eradicating my image and restored governor's privileges, but it would take time before legislation came to pass even with his overarching authority. In case of any suggestions or disapproval, Opek remained in my disposition. Made it very clear he will honor my choice to remain unknown, unless I decided otherwise. Despite understanding why I kept in the dark, he expressed great hope in bringing this news to public. Since he knew my identity first hand, conclave would have no other choice but to accept me, despite their ignorance. Any psyker under inquisition wings was capable enough to see into me and this past of mine. As he wrote "there would be no dispute".

Later, Janna came with Katarina to speak about what happened. This time she tried to leverage inquisition as an excuse to prosecute me if I didn't cooperate. With every refusal, she only got angrier, until finally finally dropping her usual self. In moment of sincere care for her sisters, she asked to know what was the thing that made Hakobyan suddenly shiver in fear, because it looked like I charmed him with black magic. Something she couldn't accept no matter his authority.

Since it was for first time I saw her drop acting tough, something loosened up. Made me more . . . sympathetic to her. Sisters listened to my explanation with great attention. Omitting most crucial parts of past, there were few things they could know. For starters, I explained them that my powers reached beyond reality or warp, being created in laboratory for purpose of wielding power akin to Necron Lords, and that is reason I wear Blackstone infused equipment. Once inquisitor saw my voyage, he understood I was the only hope of defeating this chaos thing. What I said to her earlier wasn't just boasting.

In return, she plead guilty to alarming inquisition of me. Especially extent of my different powers. Her second in command wanted to know where did I come from. This time, there was no need to lie, so I told them partial truth, from Terra, and last time I visited home was 5 000 years ago. They humbled down to know my birth place, but wondered who my parents were. This would not come to pass and they met with wall in that case. Matter of my family wasn't a topic to discuss. I still didn't lie telling them I was a noble.

Girls were curious how and why I even ended up in this place anyway. That is not simply answered, and no amount of lies could make it more believable. All I could offer was to tell them that "will of the Emperor guided my path through life". Neither of them liked secrecy, but inquisitorial protectorate gave me blank card for my behavior. Something even they wouldn't dare to break. Nonetheless, sisters continued to ask me questions. As subjects fell to matter of what I encountered inside cloning facility, Janna tried to extract more information I already gave her, with details concerning this genetic upgrade, informing me she disclosed real situation to Katarina. They didn't like to hear no, but well . . . I already told them it was better not to. This way nobody would try to recreate it.



As you can imagine, two canonesses will not back down from demon horde, not to mention simple interrogation. Well . . . they certainly weren't ready for this. Their greatest surprise came in knowledge that Ada was test subject A1 and progenitor template for Lydia as well as dozens of more sisters. Once truth was out, just like me, they couldn't unsee connections of all warmaidens. Similar looks, similar behavior, similar responses, similar prowess, similar feelings. Just like in your case, wall of denial stiffened them for a while. Janna kept cold blood. To clarify position of each one, I had to explain how to spot well cloned specimen, with little soul substance behind, and realborn, soulful entity.

On the other hand, it somewhat comforted them to know they themselves were not subjugated to such treatment, being wholly themselves, following will of the Emperor out of their heart's calling. I suspected that broadcasting array facility process imprinted behaviors into human psyche after being delivered from black sites.

Good thing both of them had their brains intact despite all indoctrination and still could see past Imperial Creed's limitations. Janna suspected for years something was off. Since day Synthia introduced beautification doctrine to daily habits and training, order changed from front line purification force, to personal bodyguard organization for top figures in ecclesiarchy. And we already seen how it ended for some of their sisters . . . She didn't want to move subject any further, as we had more pressing matters at hand. They knew I wouldn't tell them everything and accepted whatever I provided with hope more would come once this whole chaos abomination was destroyed. Here, Katarina wanted to discuss what did I know about upcoming assault on Shogo. Not much, actually. Only what inquisitor told me. Janna provided me with all data they gathered over movement of our fleets. It looked like every available fleet concentrated in Hephaestus system, with minimum effort put against Ork invasion. Almost one hundred vessels from whole sector.

Judging by size of the fleet, it was easy to assume frontal and decisive attack on everything in Nerolinia system. My fear was that . . . it wouldn't be enough. With all sacrifices done every day, I was sure that demons have already been spawned in whatever dungeons they performed rituals in. Those weren't exhausted any soon, as Shogo's hive cities were biggest in entire sector. Almost 30 billion registered population and Emperor one knows how many in lower hives. With little information we gathered from it's surface, multiple human farms were already emptied of their victims. Tally of the dead reached over 14 million even before we started to shoot.

This was his boon . . . I felt it when looking at data, which he then augmented and corrected, slithering into my mind the real number. Over 42 billion souls . . . his cold gaze drenched me in chills as I dreaded to think what kind of monster would require to feed him so much to defeat. My hands shook like in chilling cold. Unseen grip took hold of my heart and squeezed. So many . . . but he only waited. Patiently. He let me feel the assurance of whatever was to come. It didn't matter if I believed it or not. There was no escape . . . He saw cosmic rivers of energy in way only outsiders could . . .

Sisters thought my condition worsened, when monitoring apparatus started to buzz in alarm. Nursery staff came in to check, but I let them know it wasn't about my body. After staff left us alone, Janna only intensified. For her, this signified something so big and horrendous not even I could keep it a secret. To

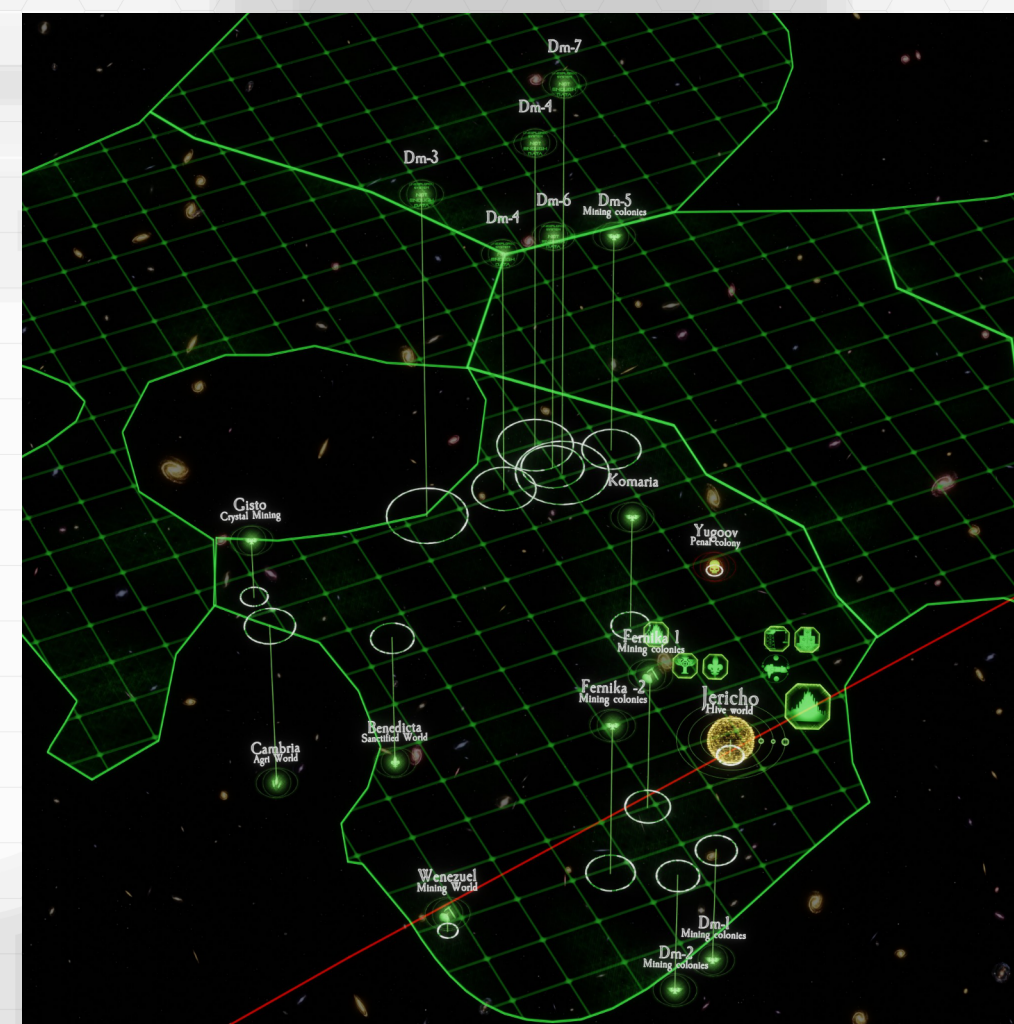


swiftly gaslight her, I directed their attention to secrecy behind inquisitor's actions. After all, even she wasn't informed of any of this before, despite being so faithful and head commander of which hunters in entire sector. Most of all, he knew what was going on at Shogo, but did not react any sooner. I wondered if he would at all, had it not been for my untimely interventions. He had agents working there. Actions of SoS were available to him at any time. No doubt he acquired data from other places as well.

My point was, that something big was about to happen, trying to weave situation into this straw man argument . . . I told them I had a feeling that to save planet, it would have to undergo exterminatus due to extent of chaos' actions. Not only cultists run free without repercussion, but they gathered in open rebellion in one place. Something wasn't right.

She saw my arguments as valid, but couldn't mistrust an inquisitor, even if he kept her in the dark. As long as Emperor's will was done. Before they left, I asked her to, just in case, be prepared for total retreat. This time, with great authority behind my words, I proclaimed to her, that planet Shogo was going to burn one way or another. To save whole sector, she'd have to sacrifice one planet. I doubt she understood my intention at that time, but it looked like my sincere request made her think.

As you might imagine, I didn't feel proud to lie to her, but . . . how in the world was I supposed to explain to her feelings of lurking C'tan.





— Arrival Day [160] — Pursuit day [144] — Day of reign [112] —

Next day, I received communications from Hakobyan. He wished to know how was my health and how long till my full recovery, and other such things. His plan took into account my full power. As far as Shogo was concerned, he already quarantined Nerolinia and prepared for all out attack, followed by planetfall. Honest estimation of my recovery wasn't anything to put his plan in abeyance, but he adjusted time for 6 additional days. According to his spies, demons were already running around rural areas. PDF couldn't do much to stop them, giving ground as chaos pleased. Corrupt government only fueled incompetence, resulting in total disorientation of whatever forces still remained loyal to the Imperium. I asked how much population is he willing to sacrifice to keep knowledge of demons from reaching public, on which he replied "as much as necessary". Repopulating world would be much less trouble than painstaking culling of chaos infected planet. Can't say I didn't understand his logic, but he already crossed out possibility of recovering planet intact. My opposition made him reconsider, but it remained plan for worst case scenario. It turned out he already prepared for exterminatus, arming black ship with viral bombs.

All this sounded too extreme even for inquisition. How come few pockets of demons became such threat as to exterminate whole planet? He confessed, he wasn't entirely honest with me. Two solar days after Basket Of Thorns destroyed astral prison, this . . . creature was summoned by Slaanesh worshipers in one of their unholy nests. This ravenous thing not only did not need sustenance in form of massive sacrificial pits, but could consume people directly within its vicinity on soul level. One bit of consolation was its lack of proper manifestation in real world and it's relative weakness. I asked what about Grey Knights. For starters, he clearly wasn't appreciative of this idea, but admitted already sending for Chamber Militant, yet closest ship was too far to react quickly enough. According to people on ground, beast itself consumed souls of tens of thousands people per day, extinguishing north district of any inhabitants. Once it would reach capital city, tally of the dead would reach billions. And he was willing to sacrifice all people just to starve it to death. Knights wouldn't able to help much in such situation. Any demon horde was only a secondary worry.

This is where I told him that his plan would never work. He didn't see moment of it's rising from grave, neither felt its horrid nature. If it was allowed to exist, it would find way into real space almost immediately, as it was warp entity separate from chaos. It wasn't just an egregor of collective subconsciousness, but spirit free onto itself, born within immaterium. I knew he never had any encounter with such being or could never tell a difference, so I asked him to believe in my experience and let me handle it. Hakobyan couldn't imagine how I was able to handle it, so I told him my other self would. This time, situation really sunk in. He even stopped talking for a moment. In the end, he asked me what my plan was and how would he fit into it.

Unfortunately, there was no elaborate plan. It was good, old, frontal confrontation and extermination. Once at full health, I could show him difference between son of the Emperor and his average psyker. To achieve that, I asked him to evacuate as many people as he could and try to destroy demon rituals. Grimoire

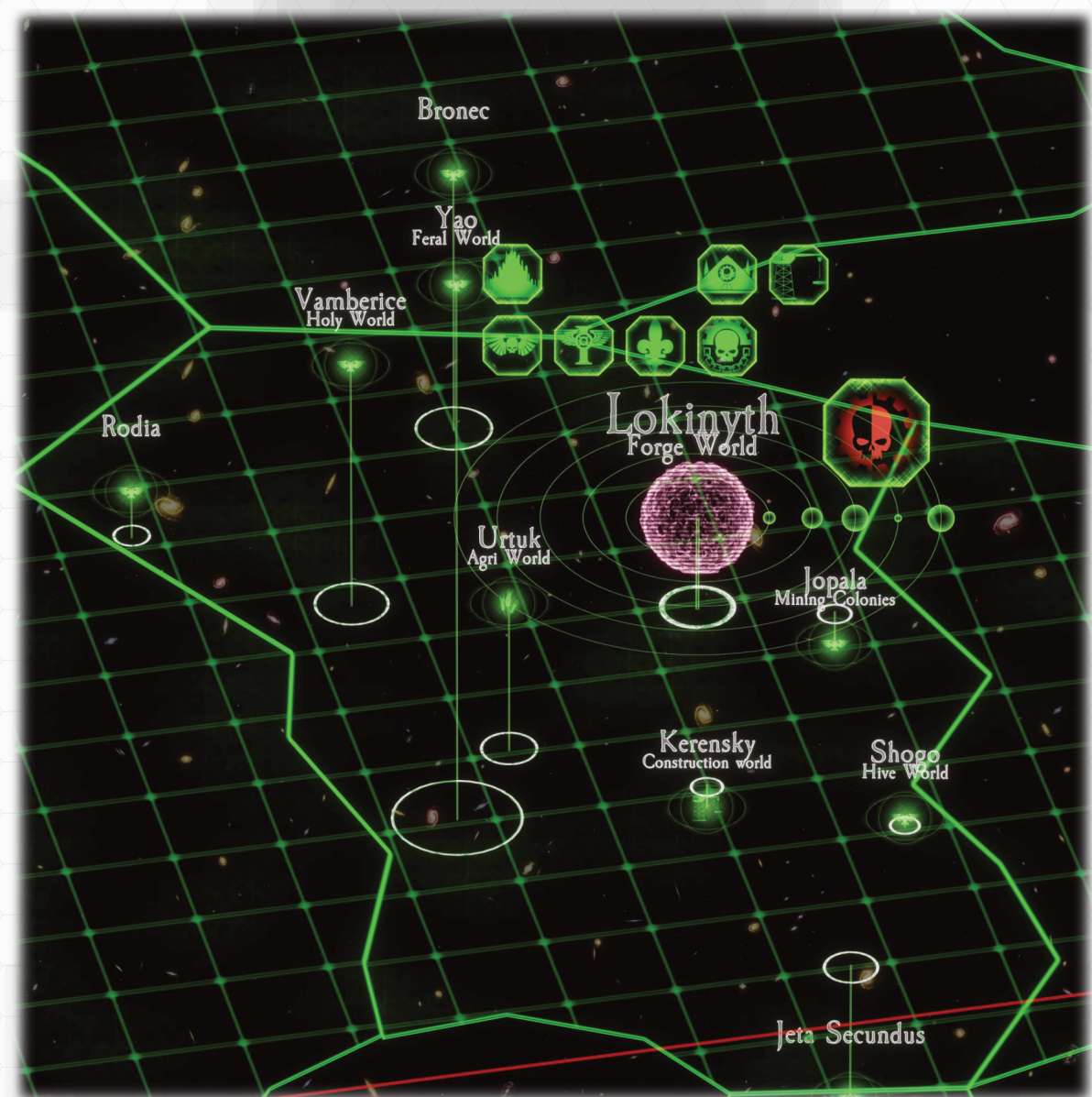


had few tips how to heal disrupted time space rift. He was glad to hear unholy relic could prove useful, but knowing what happened to me while reading it, he couldn't risk anyone study it. This only left me with one choice - to do it again. However, it already has been relocated to his ship and he was already on his way to Hephaestus.

Anyway, since this option wasn't viable, he promised to hold back monstrosity for those additional days before we arrive with sororitas.

He cut feed to leave me wondering how much more was he not telling me. But then, how much more happened he didn't know about. If everything he said was true, Mag'ladroth wouldn't be in such festive mood. Already . . . felt taste of those souls so sweet. I only hoped his unending craving was getting ahead of him.

Once Janna heard I talked to inquisitor, she came by to ask me few questions about situation over Shogo. It infuriated her to be stranded in shipyard while heretics run amok, desecrating Emperor's holy land. We talked, exchanged notes, which wasn't much, and she left me alone again.



— Arrival Day [161] — Pursuit day [145] — Day of reign [113] —

Next morning brought us little surprise as soon as sun rose behind horizon. Someone dared to attack docks. Rather large army of ragtag bandits, normal humans and all outcasts nearby hive had to offer rose up in arms, due to latest treatment. Ehhhhhhhhh . . . food shortages made public very twitchy. When someone sees how their provisions are being loaded into giant ship, without getting at least some, people rise in great wave. Better to fight for piece of bread than to die in starvation.

Janna sent out all her available warriors to quell uprising. I loathed to think how all those people would end up, but . . . we had bigger problems on our hands.

With help of skitarii, fights lasted until late night. Few vids and pikts we saw showed merciless bloodbath. Not just thousands, but tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of people bled out on the streets of shipyard manufacture district. By then, it wasn't even worrisome, but tiresome to see how Imperium "cares" for their population. No matter where or when, citizens equal to necessary evil, existing only for benefit of the wealthy. Never other way around . . .

To witness purge with my own eyes, I took a stroll outside shipyard after sunrise. Ehhhhhhhhh As you can imagine it wasn't pretty. Lower living hubs have been filed with corpses. So many, that reclamation industry cleared streets with bulldozers and heavy equipment. Trucks line up in dozens, filled with corpses, heading to reprocessing plants. Mechanicus acolytes setup a forward dissection station at corner of major crossroad, recycling any augmentation from the dead. Whatever was left of carcass, has been thrown into grinder. It was to be used in animal feed rations . . . or human.

And streets . . . streets paved with dark, black, oxidized blood. Stench of rot held back by filters. Mostly. Most depressing was leftover energy of slaughtered people. Despair, resentment, bitterness, disappointment, hate, and overbearing astral collapse baited aetheric parasites into feasting. He . . . he felt it sweet and nourishing. Delighted himself in sapping this horror, scooping whatever energies he could.

Maybe I am jaded already, but thinking about lives of those people . . . I thought it was probably better to die like that, than to live in underhive.

Once procession of sanctification came close, I decided it was enough already and returned.



— Arrival Day [162] — Pursuit day [146] — Day of reign [114] —

Next morning, captain Katarina announced early departure towards system Nerolinia. We managed to get into orbit by evening and set off towards Shogo. This wasn't usual jump into warp.

As soon as we entered immaterium, huge storm shook our vessel with relentless assault of psionic forces. Gellar field barely held together. First day brought tension within all psykers. I could feel immense pressure of power squeezing out our souls, just like at the time of releasing this monster. Whole crew couldn't sleep without nightmares. Machine spirit became erratic, cogitators popped with errors left and right, just to vanish with no consequence. Even non psykers felt within them something was wrong. The primordial feeling of your soul. Some even fell into despair. With commissar Aisha onboard, sisters perfectly managed to hold morale high. Janna even setup an hour for collective prayer, where we sat in mess halls, listening to priest preaching faith of the Emperor and singing, to incur his protection over us. I, of course, wasn't relieved from this duty. Janna knew exactly how . . . resistant was my leisure approach to religion. She put Dagmara, now promoted to canoness, and her celestians to stand guard around us, though I still looked more on food trays than my prayer book. Not even their thunderous gazes could force me to engage. It pissed them off more than anything, to be able to do nothing drastic due to inquisitorial mandate. If not for Ada or rather Lydia , who became our direct handler, I wouldn't even attend.

By second day mental issues started to surface in psyker personnel. Navigators changed their posts every hour in three shifts to avoid falling ill. Presence of this being was felt over such long distance. I couldn't imagine what we would encounter on arrival. Due to . . . Mag'ladroth, I wasn't affected like others.

For next two days, part of crew experienced hallucinations of all sorts. Some even committed self mutilation because they felt worms crawled in their stomach or veins. Over 100 people suicided. Almost 500 rendered inoperable and as such . . . have been put to rest. By this time, priest Ubek was the only thing keeping crew in morale with his feverish preaches of contempt upon all evil. Such was drastic effect of this . . . spirit pressure that even some sisters begun to waver in their faith. I saw, or rather heard, group of sisters desperately trying to find courage in one of chapels.

On fifth day, psykers begun to sustain damage just by using witch sight. 80% of navigators died. Small groups of workers deep in the ship begun to panic, which made sisters deploy armed forces around staff to keep them from waning even further. Few couldn't take unbearable mental assault and went mad on sisters. Only about 50 cases of psychosis murder spree.

All this time, I not only felt but saw power of this being constantly growing. Immense backlash of warp whipped all of us. With every passing hour as we got closer, cloud of astral body of this thing grew in size of a whole system. It was feeding all right, without any hamper.



— Arrival Day [168] — Pursuit day [152] — Day of reign [120] —

By day six only half of psykers survived journey. Sisters raised red alarm when gellar field begun to overload and collapse. There were few intrusions of random warp monsters through astropaths, but nothing serious, with minimal casualties. All personnel received instructions to arm themselves and ready for battle. Fortunately, we managed to disengage drive before anything major happened. Techpriests couldn't contain overload and gellar field collapsed few minutes after. Just in time.

Janna wanted my opinion of the situation due to my unique abilities. For me, it all looked like warp whirled and twirled in turmoil in every possible direction, like strong current of muddy water, making it impossible to correctly use it without major threat. This applied to us, as well as our enemies. I wasn't unaffected, but minuscule influence of this hampered proper healing of astral body. Even though we had allocated time, I wasn't fully in power.

Basket of Thorns emerged between orbit of Shogo and local star Nerolinia. As soon as we reestablished contact, Blackletter, inquisitor's battleship, contacted us for immediate backup as they got asses kicked by chaos rebels. Hakobyan himself was on planet Shogo, commanding defense of capital city Okana, under lengthy siege from chaos demons. From whole fleet sent to help, only 72 hips arrived and half of them were already out of combat. Katarina immediately send all power to engines to join shootout, but this would take a while. Somewhere hour into our voyage inquisitor contacted us, berating for being so late. Plans changed from last time we spoke, since he couldn't foresee how monstrous nightmare this thing would become. For time being, since he couldn't find its real name, it was designated as Nergoth. He was already being overrun in capital by hordes of cultists and demons. In his estimation, it would only take one more solar day to completely break defenses and seize hive. I asked if he tried to evacuate anyone, but he laughed at proposition. Whole damn world was drowning in hell spawns. He wouldn't risk contagion spreading. On that note, he begged me to say I have a plan as his viral bombs turned out to be too old and ineffective. First, I had to know situation in detail. In few minutes, his henchmen sent us all data they had.

Sight of the monster stunned us all. Even me. What looked like titan sized beast of purple, blazing skin, spiked with horns and blades all over its body, shaped in serpentine manner, scorched land with its fiery breath and sword woven of warp fire. Large crown of horns and set of wide wings on its back. Grey scale body toned by orange glowing veins underneath. Maw of thousand spikes protruding from almost stone like scales. From footage we saw, it moved on foot, air and even in void. Not only big but also agile and tough. Even orbital bombardment left little impression. It served as deterrent, but couldn't damage it. Sisters never saw such abomination of existence. Most of voidsmen present on bridge lost all will to fight after seeing its capability. Ubek started to cite his holy scriptures in whisper, slapping waning soldiers with a palm stick. Janna turned to me and stuck her piercing gaze right in my face, asking if I was still up to the task. I nodded affirmative . . . after all . . . it wasn't my first time and . . . I was fully aware of what had to happen . . . Yeah . . .



Aside from Nerogoth, armies of chaos plundered planet to its exhaustion. Until now, 3 billion fell pray already in mere two weeks of its manifestation. Shogo held on, but three other planets have been already completely overrun. Akeno ceased to exist. It's rubble now stretched as asteroid crest over Shogo. Few parts already fell to planet, leaving huge craters and decimating quarter of landmass. Hakobyan already called for exterminatus forces, but they wouldn't make it in time due to perturbations in the warp. Whatever fleet fought on, protected space over crucial region, with most of them unable to retaliate against entrenched forces around starports.

And . . . Mag'ladroth . . . hissed and giggled over his next feast, preparing for red harvest once again. Situation was hopeless until point of calling over exterminatus fleet. Looking at the data flying over our screens with increasing casualty reports all over the place, I myself fell into doubt. Perhaps despair . . . All of them were about to die anyway . . . all I could do . . . was to erase monster with everybody else. By this time, my incomplete healing didn't even matter.

I told Hakobyan to pull all of his forces out and evacuate system. Everybody thought I lost my mind, naturally, but he surmised what I was going to do. It took only few precision words to make him rage in helplessness over this clusterfuck. In the end, Tigran understood that there was no better way to destroy Nerogoth, but to unleash another monster at it.

He paced few moments around his bunker, cussing and cursing this damnable world. Sisters tried to ask what was going on, but he ignored everything. I nagged him, reminding that every minute he delayed, beast had more chance to feed itself even stronger. We relayed to him that energetic drain effect this had reached as far as other star systems. He calmed down emotions and returned to strategic planning with logic. They had no idea such thing went on outside, because all communications have been cut off. Now they knew why. Finally, he asked me what needs to be done if I were to erase abomination for good.

For that, I only needed someone to deliver me on surface, in its vicinity. Basket of Thorns had large hangar bay. Valkyries would be perfect for this. Orbital drop site adjustment would take too much time in constant changing front line. We even could be challenged for proper drop position. After everything was settled, I insisted he would really disengage and leave whole star system with all people he could save. Basket of Thorns had to stay to deliver me on surface. Inquisitor offered his men and sisters of silence for my protection, but I refused. Null maidens of such prowess are far too precious to just waste them. Especially when I knew how this whole hell would end. It sparked hot dispute among officers to hear how inquisitor agreed to drop me alone to end this being and stop whole chaos invasion. Understandably, literary everyone doubted there was anything but the Emperor who could challenge this monster.

His worry however, was my own well being in particular. What would happen to me even if monster was slain. Well, I told him to worry about me not, since I cannot die no matter what. If I got smeared into paste, my astral body would reenact creation of my body in few days. If they find me drift in in void, they only needed to put me into warm bed and I'd recover in few days as well.

Something broke within him. With deep sigh cautioned me that Emperor is immortal as well. This implication, even if not direct and subtle, affected everyone in room, not just me. Even sororitas. Janna didn't know why inquisitor



cared about me so much, but she promised she would stand by his decision till the end. Lydia volunteered to lead commandery sending me off. In short time, everything has been settled. Voices quietened. Our plan set. Nobody could understand logic behind any of my or Hakobyan's decision, but they would follow orders to the letter.

Katarina dismissed briefing and called everyone to their posts. Vessel was about to enter combat zone. Lydia took me to armory to properly prepare for upcoming battle. She eyed me . . . weirdly. Very shyly. Avoiding contact whenever I looked back at her. Even though we moved fast through miles of corridors, she took her time to ask me about my wounds, state of mind, resolve and we chatted for a time until reaching reliquary. She was sure I needed the best equipment there is, to be able to fight such Daemon, and had techpriestes prepare selection of all relics, normally available only for most honored warriors. When I told her I didn't need equipment, she lowered head asking if I was about to perform self-righteous suicide for some kind of redemption. Setting this "redemption" aside, she clearly hid something from me, so I asked if there was something wrong happening to her. Perhaps influence of Nerogoth got to her, but she dismissed my guess as victimization, quickly walking out, leaving me with techpriestes alone. In normal situation, such boon would be a godsend, but on path we were about to thread, no such weaponry could help us.

We already had all we needed. I already had all I needed. Time of denial came to an end and reality demanded to pay it full attention. Shivers run through my body whenever I thought about all those souls consumed by . . . me. Other me. After all, it would be my doing, feeding him . . . My choice . . . my sin . . . my purpose of existence. He . . . couldn't contain himself anymore. But for once it was a good thing. It shielded me completely from unwanted influence no matter how hard something knocked on this shield. At same time, he incited fear within me, sending me thoughts of absolute destruction and chaos reign all over galaxy. Partially, I knew it to be true. Especially when knowing all madness galaxy went through already.

A: Was it a fair bargain?! You joking me? 47.5 billion souls sacrificed to erase a warp entity? Whole fucking hive world. And its system.

A: Later consequence for sector's workforce be damned, what right anyone had to just . . . just like that . . . use them as bargain chip for one monster.

A: Yeah, I know you do much worse ratio than this just to get point across.

A: Sure . . . with hindsight, after knowing all I know now, we could just wait for fleet to arrive, but then . . . Or do just fucking nothing at all . . . Both me and Tigran took the best decision we could think of. More than this . . . We were forced to take it.

After I refused any weaponry and walked out Greta waited for me in armory entrance. It was even pleasant meeting, without unnecessary harangue about my conduct. She wanted to know why no weapons, so I told her I am the best weapon there is, over which she worried and dismissed as yet another of my delusions, frowning upon this crazy endeavor. With little to none of desire to



listen to her, I just passed on and headed towards hangar bay. She reluctantly followed me as ordered by superiors to guide me.

By the time we arrived, someone already brought my personal equipment. As it turned out, Ada with her new friends came to see me off. For once, someone treated me as normal human . . . as friend. Germain came with her and few other people from their retinue to pay me last goodbyes. Ada almost cried to think it could be last time we see each other. Even my remainders that I cannot die didn't cheer her up. Damian assured me she is very overreacting, being utmost sure Emperor held me in his light and blah blah blah, so on. Nonetheless, it felt weird to have someone come to me even after all that happened. As nice it was to have them, security reminded them of their allocated time and took them back to safety zone, me . . . begun to pack up. For this skirmish I really only needed my gauntlets and appropriate clothing for weather on the surface. Full ceramite armor, phase sword, volkite pistol and my renewed PDA brick. To compliment accouterments, few food rations found its way into backpack, just in case.

Pilot of my Valkyrie informed me we still had 4 hours until deployment. I spent it on meditation. Two hours later, alarm announced firing positions and all hands on deck. We engaged in heavy ordnance exchange. Shots of macrocannons as well as received blows vibrated through VTOL enough to feel it under my body. It ended in just one hour. After another, Lydia appeared with two squads of sisters and four squads of guardsmen, who begun to embark on their flight. In total, 8 dropships have been assigned to our escort. All men looked proud of their duty. Major Lukas something, commander of his detachment, expressed how great honor was it for him and his men to participate in accompanying me to such glorious battle.

Once all pleasantries ended, I looked for one last time how situation developed on the surface. Inquisitor roused all available void capable ships from capital and loaded them with people in emergency evacuation procedure. All freighters, transporters, ferries and even personal AVs were about to take off with millions of people on board, under cover of what remained of fleet. In their estimation, evacuation would end by the time we reached drop range.

Any satellite footage vanished from real time availability. Last known position of Nerogoth pointed to 30 kilometers from Capital, scorching lands between. From 8 billion people in capital, estimated 71 million would be saved. . . but saved . . . isn't a proper word. Perhaps those people were ignorant of what really happened or perhaps they served as mental crutch for Hakobyan. Either way, remaining 44 billion were abandoned. So much death . . . Three other planets reported catastrophic scale losses of almost 100%. That's 3 billion more . . .

I dropped data sheets when Lydia came into transport. She would accompany me for this flight. We waited in quite awkward atmosphere for next 40 minutes, exchanging only few sentences, but it was so very obvious something bothered her I wanted to ask what it is all about. Flight deck coordinator however, announced litanies of wrath as our departure prayers before I managed to gather any guts.

Since only I had a prayer book, yes I did take it with me for good luck, Lydia sat beside me. A bit too close and cozy for my taste, but whatever, singing was her thing so I didn't say a word. After my attempt of holding it open for us in hand, she said it would be easier if we held it together. Call me crazy but I never before heard of such behavior in Sororitas. She put palm of her hand on mine and we



went along program. Mostly her, I just made impressions of singing.

Not going to lie though. To sit with her body to body seemed unreal to me. Even if clad in full battle armor, she still was Ada's twin. For this one moment, her perfumes and wonderful voice made me forget where I was and what was about to happen next. There even was musician who played massive organs heard in whole hangar. One last time of leisure before I went off to work.

But it ended fast . . . perhaps too fast . . . To think I would trade few moments beside her for apocalyptic battle . . . I didn't know myself what to think of it. From very beginning, there were supposed to be no traces of me, no acquaintances, no friends, no . . . partners . . . And as much I didn't want to involve anyone, as much I wanted to involve that someone . . .

We lift off with our 8 escorts and 4 full wings providing us void cover from fire outside. Fortunately, horizon was clear. Almost all enemy ships set off in pursuit of retreating fleet. Cruiser trying to challenge Basket of Thorns tragically regretted its decision.

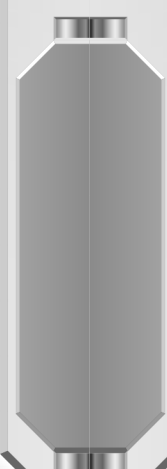
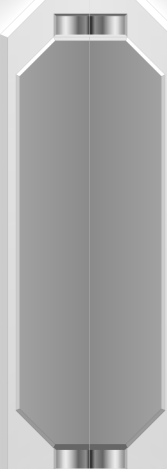
With 37 minutes of flight, I couldn't sit tight in seat. All kinds of emotions swirled inside me. Most of all, guilt for what was about to happen to whole world. Canoness saw my restlessness. She even got up and tried to talk to me, set my mind straight, clear me of any doubts before they dropped me all alone. But . . . she seemed even more nervous than me, saying it wasn't anything remotely as important as my mission, so I shouldn't pay any attention, yet it didn't sound convincing. Almost like she *wanted* me to ask. Instead of words, I read into her mind, searching for deceit or worse, treachery, but no . . . what I found . . . man . . . Eh h h h h h h h h h h . . . She actually liked me. I felt how she developed feelings for me. Just like Ada . . . It . . . didn't help . . . She cared, even against her creed.

Part of me was . . . happy to have such . . . companion, but I knew it was all like a dream. Something ethereal, never to materialize. Reality would not allow it to pass most basic checks. I must admit it made me anxious as well. To clear my head, I needed to resolve this situation. For both of us.

Lydia stood near me, holding in hands some kind of necklace and whispering something under her own lips. I asked if it was precious to her. She confirmed, telling story how one her canoness gifted it to her. Not as much as gifted, as passed on, when Maia, her superior at that time, who charged on xeno trenches under direct artillery fire. Eventually managed to break through defensive lines, but sustained mortal wounds. Sisters were to late. Lydia held her in arms, through those last breaths, but before departure, she declared Lydia as next commander, passing this necklace to her.

Tried not to . . . impose, but asked how did she look like. Just as I imagined, she described sister similar to their progenitor. It gave me all incentive to finally muster enough courage to ask what did she think of Ada, since it looked like they became friends. It made her hands clench . . . she commented only that Ada was "beautiful as all sisters should be".

I didn't know how to interpret it, and for love of the Emperor, I certainly did not want to dive in her thoughts again, but she held aura steadily readable. With no other hook for conversation, I asked if Janna told her anything about Ada. It made her ask why would I be interested in it anyway, so I responded with truth, that they seemed very similar, like real . . . family. Sad wince over repeated word "family" told me all I needed to know. Canoness sat down and gazed at icon of her





order, embedded inside silver frame connected to thick, silver chain.

After moment of silence, I felt urge to push more. Questioned her if she was aware of their connection. She finally opened herself a little. Very withdrawn, almost whispering to her self. She knew something was weird from the moment they met. Since days of her predecessor, there were few sisters with striking resemblance of Maia, but nobody could come close to Ada, so she spoke with her at times I have been busy on bridge. After few conversations, Lydia begun to suspect something of it had connection to underground complex beneath Transmission Array Center on Mara. In her own words, Ada admitted to her that yes, it was connected as much as them both were. She then invited her to secluded room to explain everything. At first, Lydia denied everything as nonsense, but after such revelation, she couldn't stop seeing patterns. By the time we arrived at Lokinyth for resupply, she came to conclusions and confronted Janna, who had all the data available. Even those on my PDA she destroyed. No amount of denial could suffice. Her superior conformed her sorrows, but . . . reassured they were human beings on their own, not just wicked experiments of a madman.

After that, she learnt few things about Reitziger, how he kept Ada in the dark about what was actually happening, but most of all . . . traits embedded in each phenotype. With huge troubles and stuttering, she confessed that line A1 was always prepared for becoming my bride, being congenitally conditioned to develop feelings for me, embedded at soul matrix level with affinity for my spirit energy pattern.

This was bizarre confession and very troubling, since it confirmed Reitziger prepared this whole plan decades in advance, if not centuries, but one most intriguing thing remained – just how did he even know I would come to Mara.

On the other hand, it was perfect opportunity to ask if she herself fulfilled tenets of her genetic line. In, what I can only describe as shy confession, she just “umph’ed” to me. I can't even say if it made me happy or sad. My heart felt light again, but somehow mighty disappointed. Not because of her, but because this whole situation deprived any of us out of . . . real life. Of any chances for . . . I don't know, a glimpse of hope? Even whole damn sector has been artificially adjusted for purpose of his game. Whole damn CR, SoS, Drukhari, Imperium and even inquisition danced to his tune for so damn long without realizing anything . . .

Perhaps even me . . .

I asked her if she regretted her feelings, but she couldn't find words to answer. What looked like anxiety, was in fact emotional turmoil, which didn't let her thoughts rest. I sat beside her, pulling out prayer book, put it on my lap and asked if she was interested in any of it. She glanced at me and at book interchangeably, not being sure what were the intentions, until I opened it up and held in between us. Reluctantly, but she put her hand over mine and smiled. Then, she flipped few pages. When she saw how I reacted, asked what was wrong, so I said, that Ode To The Emperor was only thing I actually know from prayerbooks. After deep sigh, she returned pages back and we started to sing. Perhaps the first time in my life I really tried my best to honestly sing this tune. With few minutes remaining until planetfall, she asked me to let her pray in silence.

Just few second before entering atmosphere, we received distress call from Lord Ytvik Kelembrah asking for help against huge forces of monsters prowling through city, sent on all channels. Lydia looked at me, awaiting in suspension for



my decision. I thought it would be only in order, to start cleansing from the very bottom of this mess and directed our pilot to capital. If inquisitor left them behind, there had to be a reason to. I even knew what was it.

Change of course elongated out flight by few minutes, but there were absolutely no anti- air defenses present. Whatever held such capacity was already rolled out against armies of chaos. Cultists hijacked heavy equipment, turning it against Imperium. Even from above, streets blazed in shots, las fire and massive explosions. Smoke over hive begun to thicken, where city sized fire consumed whole spires. We saw in distance great beast flying over skyline. For now, around 20 to 25 kilometers from central spire complex, but it didn't look good. Fortunately, hive wasn't that tall, just over 3 kilometers at highest point. On the other hand, city stretched over horizon in every direction without any major hive complexes. Snowfall obscured most of it. One thing that couldn't be obscured, was the overbearing stench of chaos my astral body felt with all its unpleasant might.

Lydia forwarded mission parameters to sisters, but I canceled them immediately, stating that all of them will return as soon as they deliver me. Canoness wasn't going to cowardly run away in face of heretics, but I reminded her whole world has already been doomed to die by order of an inquisitor. This cooled her down enough to stop talking to me at all.

We arrived at midday, right on premises of governor's palace, high in clouds. Winter time on Shogo is, was, mildly cold, usually dropping only few degrees below water freezing, but at such height it sure was cold. Top floors of spire has already been trimmed by massive ordnance by few hundred meters, which collapsed, damaging structures below. We circled around it to spot any viable landing zones. Eerie sight to witness how over one kolometer of top spire has been abandoned. Highest lighted rooms ended somewhere above middle floors. Someone contacted us via radio, partially asking, partially commanding to land at Ministorum zone while passing warm greetings of the governor.

Armed with knowledge and guarded by hope, sisters headed towards outer landing zones. Perhaps not in clouds anymore, but light snowfall obscured city at large. We heard shots in the distance but they were so far we couldn't see. As soon as door opened, weird feeling of rotten miasma hit my astral body, like putrid smell of decaying flesh. Someone or something made a lot of mistakes in this place. I could smell chaos like at palm of my hand.

Detachment of guardsmen was rabidly happy to see someone come to their rescue in such dire times. Lydia came out with me, greeting general. I can't remember him or his men. When he finally understood it was me coming to help, he shouted out praises to the Emperor for such godsent help. Inquisitor made sure to undo damage to my image at least there, feeding them story about me being a bait for the chaos to flash them out of hiding. Everyone knew just how powerful I was and looked forward to my expertise. When Hakobyan set off world, he promised such help from Emperor himself, not even his fleet could provide. Two priests and few scribes accompanied us inside.

Through giant gate laced with gold and stained glass, our hosts led us to open saloon, where we could shake off cold. Inside, four interesting personas waited for us already, unaware of implications of this whole mess. In their morbid, nightmarish fear, clowns tried to run out, but I gripped their legs firmly, falling their dumb faces of marble floor. Ytvik, von Rosette, Martens and their pal who I don't even care to remember.



Lydia quickly drew her sword and run toward them in furious yells of anti-heretical applications of oral violence. I asked her to calm down and stand by, but she didn't listen and I had to restrain her before this rage escalated. Meanwhile, while I pulled all four high into air, any other guest run out screaming. General demanded my explanations over this incident, threatening to use their weapons on us. Threats of people who shake with fear don't work.

One look of Lydia's furious gazes was enough to prevent development of situation. And her vociferous commands. Few seconds later every other sister barged inside with weapons fully ready for carnage, followed by every soldier we had with us.

Most of people begged not to kill them. General asked to be pardoned had he done something wrong, clinging to his faith in my judgment. Greta wouldn't stand any guardsmen aiming at her canoness, smacking down anyone who even lifted their weapon.

Lydia needed to call sisters in line and clear situation, while I closed all doors inside and dropped my prisoners in the middle of dancing parquet. In howls of pain and broken bones, they tried to call their people to gun me down. Von Rosette even took his pistol out, but I broke his arm in every joint, twisting them in all directions. His screams amused Mag'ladroth so much he whispered for more, sapping dark thoughts into me. Truth is, I really did want to play "what happens at black mass" with him, increasing my resentment. Thankfully, I learned how to control his . . . thirst. But . . . with time ticking short . . . any means of interrogation or tortures would be just too inefficient. Mind ripping was the most convenient route.

They yelled with every step I took towards them. Mostly about mercy and forgiveness. At least von Rosette had dignity to bite the pain and curse me with all known cusses in the world.

Without any foreword, I grabbed his head and dived into him. Aside from his scum life and all atrocities he committed, I wanted to see his last month of life in great detail. Most of all, how did they manage to summon such beast.

As it turned out, all important members of SoS escaped from Mara day after I decided to put Amelia Alastor as next governor. Unfortunately, due to far reaching knowledge of their real operations, she had to die. Just like Jhiddu, who was let go as sacrificial pawn to the mob. As soon as they arrived at Shogo, contacted inquisition, painting me as heretic who usurped power and led bloody war to pacify all opposition to rip whole world from Imperium for myself. They even used their ships to destroy food shipment and blamed it on me. Then used another false flag operations to prove those claims.

Over standard month before, Reitziger sent SIN a sacrificial blood, in strange, conical, smoky glass container he was supposed to use in his ritual, as token of appreciation for support over all those years. SIN became heavenly delighted to feel raw, undiluted power emanating from it. Never took a second to think how could this even exist, much less whether he should use it. In few next days of spiritually testing the sample, dozens of cultists tried to kill each other over it, sensing dark whispers of possession and power in their heads. Some dared attempt on his life. In turmoil, SIN found ecstasy, cutting into pieces all his victims. He told Ervin it would only strengthen his pleasures during orgies.

During this time, Ervin talked inquisitor's ear out. At first, Hakobyan didn't



care what they did. Just sent agent to be in contact, while he stayed out in the void, looking for something. Only when Edmund proposed them to say I possessed this unholy, chaos artifact inquisitor changed his mind, decreed my immediate deletion from records and pursued me. With inquisition gone from their doorstep, they returned to debaucheries.

Two weeks later black rites finally happened, when appropriate amount of souls have been gathered. At first nothing looked out of ordinary, but once SIN, who took off his mask for first time, unveiling his putrid, pale Eldar skin, who poured this blood of his face, while consuming flesh of his fresh sacrifice. Nobody seemed to be concerned about strange markings on the vial, seemingly taking it as human pikts of corporate icons. I . . . recognized them as identical to those in black grimoire. Those were sigils of binding warp entities. Fucker Reitziger bound something to vial. At this moment, it became clear to me, that it was my blood. Cocktail so potent no mortal soul could live through it. Not even farseers or even primarchs, not to mention Drukhari.

In few next hours SIN turned into heavenly, godlike, beautiful man of immaculate wonder, attraction and charisma. His powers seemed to be multiplied by dozens of times, enough to crush stones with bare hands. He felt completed and finally free of Slaanesh curse plaguing his soul for thousands of years. Until night. Soon, his head started to hurt so much he poked out his eye to reach into cranium to pull out hurting nerves. Despite humongous pain and damage, he couldn't die . . . well . . . welcome to my world, fucker. Served him right.

Warp rift started to open in villa they resided in. To shut up his yells of writhing in pain, Ervin pulled out gun and ended him right there, shooting his head clean off. This didn't help. Body still twitched in pain, even after humongous loss of blood. They became terrified of outcome.

At first, only few ghostly apparitions hunt his estate, but in next hours, first demons materialized. Hour after hour, more monsters came after residents, which made them flee south, to capital, 9 days ago. Morning after, giant beast appeared over east coast of mainland, right where this villa was located. Demons seemed to appear in many places at once, throwing whole population in terror and fear. Some of them were captured, with no knowledge of their destiny, but . . . we all could imagine what that was.

Over 5 days later, inquisitor Hakobyan appeared with Imperial fleet, prosecuting whole world for worship of chaos. Even in their own minds, it was too much of a coincidence. Fights over power erupted on the streets. Inquisition . . . wasn't any more delicate than chaos when it came to persecution of heretics. World exploded in holy war. They camped in bunkers of Ytvik, hoping to deceive Tigran long enough to gain his trust, but all hope faded when he organized mass escape this morning, promising help was on the way. "One that could deliver whole world into Emperor's grace".

I wasn't delicate when extracting all those memories. Combined with ongoing warp turmoil, it fried his brain. And body. And . . . soul. When I refocused back to reality, his gray carcass already begun to collapse into ashes. Head burnt from inside, bleeding from every opening with black goo. First sacrifice to Mag'ladroth.

Martens begged me to let him live, promising everything he ever could. Neither Ytvik or his chancellor said a word after. General paled in fear as sisters



rounded everyone up under wall. He couldn't believe his rank bore absolutely no authority over Sororitas. Greta . . . oh, Greta . . . didn't like his restitutionary attitude one bit. She had him cuffed and gagged. I tried to calm soldiers down, telling them to just sit down and do nothing as this had nothing to do with people loyal to the Emperor.

Martens squealed like flayed pig by just lifting him off ground. His hurting knee didn't help in keeping composure. He cried in pain while yanking out of my grasp when I gripped his bushy hair, bringing to knees. Looking at his pitiful face, I reminded him of all misery he caused for people of Mara and whole sector. He tried to defend himself by saying he was just doing his work and it was all von Rosette's fault, but I felt no remorse. Cold. Hatred. He was going to be second one I sacrificed to Mag'ladroth. He, of course, delighted in this appetizer, for first time since seven centuries he was finally taste sweet, primordial fear and pain of mortal being, dedicated solely to him.

With no security measures in place, I dove into his head to recover whatever I could, to help me with Nerogoth, but after all, he was just useless pawn. Except for connections and possible solutions to Mara's corporate situation, there was nothing useful. His . . . companions already used up . . . in their wicked rituals. Every henchmen died trying to defend him from monsters. All he had left was his skin and glory of past.

I came back to withering, nightmarish figure, twisted out of normal human shape, like wind elongating all his features in horrific expression of death. All his body turned into ashen crystal. Even hair. Once I let go of . . . it, cracks begun to split and fall apart like real ash. Lydia winced her eyes in fear. I finally noticed her constraining and darkening aura. Not because of what has happened or what she saw, but what has happened to me. She felt brutalized to see how I dealt with both of them. She feared for my fall. It was so obvious, even Greta noticed something about me was off. Neither have ever felt such murderous intent from me. No . . . this wasn't even murderous intent. Not even total contempt . . . It is very hard to explain how does it feel, to be reinforced my ravenous C'tan. Not merry. Not fun . . . but he . . . He was all bells and whistles. Taste of soul revitalized his desire of red harvest. He craved for more. Much more. And so hard, he even dripped his power into me for . . . incentive. Just a small drizzle, but . . . enough to level whole spire with one hand . . . Suddenly astral plane darkened. Psyker priest in corner yelled in unholy scream of fear and pain, screeching like little girl, shaking violently . . . just at first sight of void dragon stepping into immaterium. Even more than ravenous presence of Nerogoth. Then both of them fell to knees, praying to the Emperor for protection.

One look at Lydia said everything. She . . . perhaps was disappointed? Sad? Ready to cry? But in resulting ruckus, she knew it had something to do with my psychic powers and warp.

I turned to Ytvik and his friend, but as soon as I made step closer, canoness shot both of them in head. She almost broke, trying to ask what has become of me. Not something you expect sororitas commander to shout.

I . . . I . . . well, I felt harvest incoming. This monster in distance ravaged through city and all the distance couldn't make up for its warp pressure. My other self strongly demanded to be fed more, but this time, one look at Lydia eclipsed any screams or naggings any parasite could ever instill within me.



I dropped all power he gave me, to return myself to normal and talk to canoness in relative normal means. I asked her to come with me to our transports for a talk. She left Greta in charge, holstered weapons and followed me.

In those few moments of silence, through slowly falling snow, I heard explosions, demon roars, artillery barrages in distance as quiet as fresh, crackling snow under my feet. Those few moments were enough to cover everything with thin layer.

We came to our Valkyrie because I needed to explain to her, that she couldn't help me no matter what actions they undertake. Lydia didn't understand my meanings and tried to impose her own interpretation upon me. Seeing, how her feelings couldn't be reasoned with, I pulled Mara's prayer book out of backpack, still laying in transport. She stared perplexed, gazing at me in wild wonder. I gave her the book, saying that she can still have her life out there . . . with her sisters. No matter what she was able to do, there was no helping neither this world, or me. I told her . . . this was our last goodbye. For moment . . . feminine nature surfaced through canoness. Her feelings got better of her. I felt her disappointment and anxiety. Bitterness. Her eyes became glossy, eyes squinted. Lips clenched.

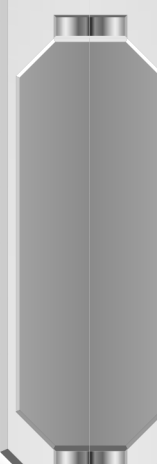
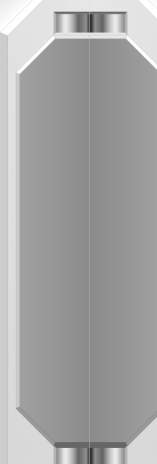
We stood there for minute. Avoiding looking at each other and listening to snowfall in silence. Since I knew her feeling, I tried to entice her sense of duty. Her sisterhood. There were many people waiting for her and all sororitas back home. She knew that Hakobyan already marked whole world for deletion. Sounds in background added weight to my words.

To muffle eerie, emotional uncomfot, I continued to enumerate all things she still could do for the emperor, without suiciding here for no good reason. As last resort, I told her that for sake of my own mind and my own feelings, I needed to know she was safe, far away from this lost planet. If that wasn't enough, I tried to delicately remind her, that Adepta Sororitas have first and foremost duty to the Emperor and no one else. Only after this she nodded in acceptance.

To avoid unnecessary complications, I went back by myself and told Greta that their duty shifted to escorting her canoness back to the ship. She didn't want to, but I used my mandate given to me by inquisitor to command her and all sisters back to the ship. I sent my colonel to gather "most notable personnel", fit as much as they can onto Valkyries and send back to Basket of Thorns.

Rest waited in silence until Valkyries departed. While my soldiers gathered appropriate aristocracy, general tried to step up as new commander, assuming temporary role of governor. He was very polite to me in thanking for sending sisters away and dealing with heretics. If he only wasn't so scared. Before he could shower me with his bullshiting skills, I told him to evacuate everyone he can and send to ship, taking as much survival supplies as they can. There was also question of my transport. He called someone on the communicator and 20 minutes later civilian AV transport landed on empty pad. General explained it was best he could muster in those circumstances, but I thanked him anyway.

Without any word of goodbye, I stepped out and changed pilot who was all too happy to do so. They tried to contact me with radio, but I cut off all communications, knowing everybody will be erased soon enough . . . With heavy heart and sense of impending doom, I lift off. I guess even after all those millennia it still left some impression on me.





It took only 10 minutes to reach chaos army. Swats of mutilated corpses, rampaging demon hulks, twisted machines of war, hordes of cultists, walls of defense lines, weapon nests, tanks, buildings, even small starships laid wasted on upper levels of outer city. In some places structural integrity failed, unveiling gaping holes all the way down to bedrock, sinking all layers of city in rubble. Fire and smoke combined with raging snowstorm, engulfing whole capital. Some fires burnt big enough to color gray fog in orange over vast spaces.

There were no defenders left. Very existence of Nerogoth sucked out life from nearby victims without need of one swing of its sword. Whatever remained, was trampled by armies of darkness. My other self couldn't stand that someone feasted on his buffet. He pushed me further and further, dripping his power as incentive.

After short aerial recon, something finally hit my vehicle, ripping out left engine. I intended to crush machine as near as gargantuan beast as possible. As soon as we hit the ground, little, hideous creatures of warp begun to run at me from nearby streets.

Since there was no retreat, and no tomorrow to look for, I went all out from very beginning. In explosion of psychic force, I cleaned nearby segmentum plate from any monster, vehicles, rubble, buildings, . . . whole top layer for blocks away. Thanks to snow, there wasn't all that big of a dust cloud, but this bought attention of . . . probably all demons in the city. Thunderous explosion should have been heard in whole capital. For few moments fog and snow vanished from area of effect.

I waited until they came to me. Once first enemies run out of mist, my shield glared in golden light, cracking lightning arcs all over the ground. Some of dumbasses became fried vapor as soon as it hit them. Whoever was foolish enough to come close, became burnt to crisp. Atomized in extraordinary shell of magnetic field. I expanded shield for dozens of meters. Be it demon, monster or even machine, eventually vaporized from existence.

It is not purely defensive mechanism. With appropriate modulation of energy, it simply becomes field of extreme electric field, burning even toughest creatures to ash. Anything bearing life energy, once in, can never get out. Very impractical when defending high priority target, but extremely useful in extermination of whole planet.

After first wave run out of bodies, I ventured forth, searching wasteland for my target. It's warp energy signature was so thick, I could sense it even from orbit. I felt it approaching me very fast, dragging behind whole damn army. Once I saw artillery pieces exploding in the fog, I knew it was close.

I hid in penthouse of one of gutted buildings overseeing what once was huge park. It looked like top of the hill with forest still on its peak. First wave, consisting of cultists and their pets run past my building to where city have been demolition few minutes before. Then . . . Then I finally saw Nerogoth.

As big as Reaver titan, but stomping remarkably lightly, without much quake underneath. Carpet of enslaved minions mindlessly run towards my last known location. His inability to sense me became great advantage. Hiding on top floor, monitoring outside with camera in my PDA I had time to muster plan of act. Before however, I needed to contact general and ask about civilian situation.

From what he told me, capital still had 58% of population hiding on lower



layers. Any void capable transport left second ago with hundreds of nobles on board. With heavy heart admitted their PDF forces to be a bad joke, loosing every corner and dying like flies. Without exposing my intentions I updated map of the city with his data and for one last time, wished him to live till tomorrow.

My other self . . . felt all those souls. Truth be told, he would just let me know where to go to feed him, but for now, I tried to use everything up my sleeve to bring down the beast by my own self.

So I hunkered down until it send most of its pawns past my position and readied up . . . For discharge.

It was inevitable it would feel surge of my power, but I hoped for the best.

Standing over window, in what looked like once comfy living room, my summoned shield begun to shine brighter and brighter, till point of glowing as much as sun, being almost as hot. Surrounding walls started to melt as monster yells filled air. Nerogoth didn't wait for second. With movement as quick as succubus, it reduced distance between us from, I don't know, half a kilometer, to slashing reach in just few seconds. Not enough time to summon my full power, but I fired the lance anyway.

With lightning discharge visible from orbit, through fog and smoke, magalopolis shrunk. My lance indeed hit Nerogoth, but not before it phased out of realspace. Almost like exterminatus class orbital laser, flash of energy ripped kilometer wide crater, reaching outskirts of hive on opposite side. Beam cut through all layers of hive and central spire, collapsing parts of segmentata into gaping maw of molten steel and rock. Whatever remained of park, mountain peak and living hubs, became . . . vaporized lump of smoldering, white glowing mass on bottom of half kilometer deep hole under me. Fog cleared out immediately in its heat. Clouds partially parted, dragged by immense underpressure caused by impetus of this energy. Snowfall was no more. Whole damn district as well. Since lance hit Nerogoth, its body dissipated half of main beam into several smaller ones, laying waste to whole district around. Scar remained not only on hive, but mountain range as well. Despite this one last gambit, my target . . . was still living.

Whatever strength I had left, I used it to fly to the ground and safe position. This one shot took everything I had. My astral body already looked like clump of melted trash. Hands hurt like burnt in living fire. Damage spread all over my body. Some of my organs begun to shut down. Muscles hurt so much I barely could lay down. Tears of pain flooded my eyes. Dark and black blood I coughed out, told me it was over . . . but Mag'ladroth . . . he just feasted over 81 000 000 of souls. Even meticulously counted each one, just to report to me, how wonderful and delicious was this meal. Of course, his hunger knows no limits and needed more and more. And more . . . Much more . . .

Seeing how I wasted myself with just one action, he derided me for being so weak. But, in order to feast more . . . revitalized me. Healed me. Lent more power and pushed up . . . whispering in amused laughter, that no matter how hard I tried . . . I would never win. It pissed me to hear it, but most of all, knowing it was the truth. Seeing how my best didn't even connect properly to this freak of warp, despair rooted itself in my heart. I just didn't know what to do.

Lying on cold stones, gravity of situation and impasse I found myself in, sunk deep within me. Even though he dipped me in his power, my mind still



couldn't comprehend what have we unleashed upon world. Then mending begun. Rapid regeneration hurt as much as incurring damage, only fueling his amusement and laughter.

Body begun to return to normal. My spirit side realigned perfectly. Except for my outside visage and clothes, everything became fine again . . . This happened 76 times before . . . uffffffffffff . . . and each and every time ended just the same . . .

Had this damnable monster not been infused with MY OWN POWER, it would have been fucking easy! But this . . . Reitziger . . . he fucking knew all along everything! Even before we met and still . . . he managed to power up this ancient god even more, with phasing out. Something only one of us could do . . . and something only one of us could fight. Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmm . . . Reitziger, Reitziger, Reitziger, Reitziger . . . What a dumb name he choose anyway . . .

Anyway! Nerogoth didn't wait until my delirium ended. Appeared over edge of cliff and slashed at me with blazing sword. Being in full power once again, it wasn't hard to deflect with just my arms, but his relentless barrage of swings mad me summon bubble again. It looked like it knew how tough my shell was to crack so without any rush, it probed me with various attacks. After just few attempts, my weak point, the need of attention and focus on my opponent, became clear. Instead of attacking, it begun to speak to me. Not with words but via telepathy. I felt it once already – on Drukhari cruiser.

Chilly, slimy and spiky voice of female monster reverberated like bell in my head, echoing through senses. It . . . she . . . finally introduced herself as Shemmeneash. In Eldar language, the god that came before. I saw how whole civilizations fell in despair feeding her hunger of souls. Hunger of the primal power. Somewhat like C'tan.

At every turn, she tried to fuel my desperation, reminding me of all of those billions of souls she already consumed, with all life she erased out of existence. She held in deepest contempt all mortal beings, toying with them from other side, as well as other major chaos entities, which she saw as weak and constrained, but most of all, she was very well aware that they have been spawned as egregors, while her being was true warp born. Hubris? Perhaps. Megalomania? Certainly. False boasting? Certainly not . . .

Then, all of a sudden, I saw glimpse of Reitziger speaking to her In front of her idol altar, inside that prison temple. Not so far from laboratory we destroyed . . . Telling her stories of wonderful, giant, sprawling, planet wide cities where untold billions of souls clustered in one place.

Yes, the question was, how in the name of Emperors Golden Balls would he even been able to talk to her while imprisoned. How anyone could ever do that. She felt my interest in this man and instantly cut it off, slashing at me relentlessly. It infuriated her to no end, to be ever indebted to a mere mortal fleshling for freeing her from this prison. In moment of talkativeness, I asked what did he want in return, on which she said, there was no bargain. For some reason I needed to know. I just needed.

Instead of just questioning damn beast, I decided to wait for proper moment and seize her movement with my grip. As you can guess, it wasn't so easy. Overpowering being of such immense strength takes a little more than I could handle. Failed attempt opened me to attack. Some kind of force threw me back



over still hot rubble, but fortunately I ended up on good, frozen, rockcrete floor, in between ruined hubs, sticking fence rod into my arm. Immediately, following my indisposition, her sword torn down few scrapers. In wide swing of this sword blazing wave of energy shot from its matter towards me through air, like cutting blade, tearing down structure of anything still standing in its way. As it wasn't enough, she run towards me spewing black fire out of its mouth. This wasn't just normal fire. It left like miniature warp rift, spraying immaterium into physical realm. It . . . was sticky like promethium, but digesting realspace objects with warp energy.

Even though I managed to bring shield up in some capacity, it still felt dangerous, sapping my strength immensely. Once blaze of this outburst vanished, our environs looked like red, glowing, lava lake. Heat of this flame melted like two feet of rockcrete on top layer. Any hub which fell into direct contact with this energy, evaporated. Buildings in distance started to fall due to structural failure of supporting platform. In spur of moment, she laughed for first time. Sound of this growl echoed in clouds. It was then I finally noticed wound on her chest. Burnt and bleeding purple blood sapped out of . . . I could only equate it ripped out scales, uncovering flesh underneath. If it even could be called like that.

Seeing how sturdy little filth I was, she decided to get on evil with me. In her thinking, I came to save the planet from total annihilation, so to show me how powerless I was against her, Shemmeneash flew out to the city, filling streets with warp blaze, piece by piece. Ignorant assumption hastened her downfall.

Despite everything going wrong, I still wanted to find another opening to attack her with full power. If half empty lance managed to incur a wound, I hoped full might of my capability could smash her to pieces. All I needed was moment of preparation and clean shot. I had the time, but to hit her before she could once again phase out, she had to be unsuspecting. How would I do that? Answer is simple – I don't . . . There was no opening. Time has come to . . . for worst case scenario. Just this one warp breath costed me about 1/3rd of my whole strength. Without his input . . . it was lost anyway.

He . . . just waited for this moment . . . when I finally gave up. It wasn't just enough to mass exterminate, with intention to feed him behind my actions. He tastes each and every bit of of soul suffering like wine from golden goblet. Instead of scavenging, and possibly making an effort to rob Nerogoth of its share, he could savor everything as exquisite gourmand dish. In addition, all souls were already primed and spiced with grave fear and terror from chaos presence.

With full deliberation and desperate heart, I walked towards edge of chasm, from where I could see skyline of hive city. He shared knowledge with me where were greatest refuge camp and patiently waited for my actions, although not even he could hide all of this excitement overflowing from every corner of his darkness.

I wavered . . . even though I knew stakes at play, even though I still felt demons rampaging through city, even though I was all to well aware how it would ultimately end, I still couldn't . . . After watching how serpentine winged beast burnt down city piece by piece for few minutes, he finally became impatient, nagging me, accusing me of procrastination and delaying the inevitable, like it was his fucking birth right to butcher whole world . . .



It only aggravated me more, but to him . . . spurring me into action was most important. We . . . or perhaps I, argued that there had to be another way long enough to make him laugh me out.

One thing he said was right . . . even if I managed to kill Shemmeneash's physical form, she would just go back to the warp . . . He always knew . . . since first day we departed for Mara from Tempera Noctis, he started to grow more amiable and quiet. He told me that day . . . “soon, you will validate your existence again”. . . It never occurred to me he was able to see so far into the threads of destiny. And we came to the point where his prophecy bore fruit.

With all his cunning might, he tried to convince me to open, meaning to let me be engulfed in his glory . . . for terrible price. Like coincidence, my PDA picked up choppy radio transmissions yelling for help, HQ's responses, sounds of slaughter and then . . . long, dead, static noise crackling . . . Certainly . . . there was no other way. . . .

To prepare myself for this, first of all, my minds has to reconnect into the ether. I stretched my arm and focused on city center. Realigning with rivers of cosmic energy, I felt where vortices of power conjugated around hive. With Mag'ladroth's he . . . help . . . I was able to focus with crystal intention. Soon, gargantuan glow of starlight illuminated darkness, skies and whole hive megalopolis in bask of green, necrotic ray laying waste

This one however, eradicated whole central segmentum and it's underlying levels, scraping pure bedrock beneath lower hive. In catastrophic loss of life, almost 1 billion found its end via C'Tan ravenous hunger. Hive was no more. Blight scar separated whole land by two mile deep crater beneath me, stretching over curvature of planet and into the void. At least sky became clear again . . .

Such is the boon of his most faithful pawn . . . I felt his . . . amusement. I myself vicariously tasted how . . . wonderfully tasty has this been. And I hated every part of it, while he enjoyed extermination once again. With all parts of his existence, he cherished opportunity to flay mortal world again with power, even if through such filthy medium as me . . .

This feast had him almost dance in happiness, while I listened to screams and soul tearing pain, inflicted upon his consumed victims. Not only did it feed him, but empowered more. In his mind . . . there were 33 billion more to consume.

For all what it was worth, demons within capital vanished . . . yay . . .

I even managed to critically wound Nerogoth, tearing off her left wing and arm, making felling her into smoldering crater, but despite all power put into this lance, she remained alive. I saw her crawling and yelling in distance, while I flew to the safe ground. To my greatest fear, after few seconds of painful twitches, her body almost instantly regenerated. In full range of hatred and anger, she flew to me, flooding whatever remained of city segments in viscous fire, spewing many volumes more than before. She didn't stop after one breath. Whole level burnt down. Mostly evaporated, but whatever still existed has become glowing embers. Even with his power, it was hard to maintain shield and fly at the same time. It only took one strong hit of her blade to send me down into molten lake beneath.

Fortunately once again, she hit me so hard, I pierced through upper levels of buildings, avoiding any hellish heat. Unfortunately, she hit me so hard that landing through four segment layers was too much to maintain shield and landing on bottom left me broke. All my bones, including cranium were shattered. Damage



left me unresponsive, somewhere in the middle of yesterday's dreams. Whole body smashed and pierced by pieces of rebar. Miraculously, I still was in one piece. Mostly.

Mag'ladroth laughed out my weakness once again. Because even with taste of his strength, I was still beaten by “inferior worm”. He knew I couldn't die. He knew that even if I evaporated in lava, our physical shape would still regenerate. He didn't care for how dead I was. One thing he wouldn't stand more than imprisonment . . . would be a defeat.

Due to state of my body and mind, our astral counterparts blended into one for a moment. Great anger filled him over how incompetent I turned out to be. That I allowed a mere winged gecko treat him, by proxy, as trashed, rugged doll . . . but he understood that I lacked power, and . . . he would give me that power of course . . . for a price.

Once again . . . he was right I couldn't defeat Shemmeneash. Not just because I was weak, but because I was capable of fighting her only on physical side. To kill her would be easy if I listened to his advice, but to destroy . . . I had to sacrifice him whole world . . .

Taking into consideration state of my body, mind and spirit in that moment, desperation won over. I agreed . . . I accepted . . . I sacrificed . . . You can imagine how ecstatic this made him. Never before had he such feast. Even during Wars in Heaven he couldn't imagine consuming such huge quantities of souls, all at one time.

For starters, he lent me enough power to put my self together. This time my own biomatter twitched and twisted in surge of primordial energies revitalizing my astral self, leading to healing my physical side in matter of seconds. This pain was also part of bargain. With mostly healed flesh, I dropped chunks of rockcrete from over me and crawl out of rubble. Of course, all foreign pieces had to be removed before process ended. Disillusioned with my strength, there was nothing more left and I let him in. To engulf me in cosmic river of power.

Sudden surge warped gravity around ruins, introducing gigantic electromagnetic anomaly over what once was capital city. It eased up my flight over top shelf. Nerogoth just flew around, digesting everything in blazing warp fire with ravenous and extreme hate, but also efficiency. She called for me in thunderous roars, searching for me, yelling after me, trying to either flush me out of bury alive under mountain of liquid rockcrete. Since she didn't have extended spirit senses, she didn't even notice I got out of lower levels. And it didn't make her think what phenomenon just occurred around us. Little by little, hive was cracked and torn. Boulders and stones started to float upwards. Magnetic vector of gravity reversed. It wouldn't last long, as support structures below melted in frightening speed, releasing even more material upwards in slow ascend. It almost seemed like hive collapsed piece by piece in real time. I waited patiently over city, waiting for it to fly out into skies. Still, her fury clouded perception. Instead of focusing on searching me, she kept on circling over hive and lashing out blazing balls of fire from sky onto ground, which exploded is fiery fury.

Since he and I made deal, there was no more need to hide. All that was left, was to complete my promise. With power given to me, I summoned one last energy blast, leveling whatever left of megalopolis and surrounding lands, to feed him his . . . appetizer.



Star like flash of energy lighted the sky. All clouds dispersed. Atmosphere thinned out. Once tundra plains, over which hive has been built, now became ocean of lava. Sudden release of energy sent shock wave across continent. As soon as I finished glowing like sun, she flew out from beneath molten land and dived onto me, readying most powerful slash she could muster and I could imagine.

This time . . . she was doomed. With strength received from Mag'ladroth, I could simply grip her with ease, locking in any motion together with immaterial flame covering her shape . . . She couldn't even scream.

I rose up into skies, dragging her sorry ass with me. I waited until under pressure leveled out and stoked firestorm underneath. Once we reached appropriate altitude, I stretched her out, but allowed to be aware, to speak and cry. First few words she yelled, were incantations of black speech. I could understand it through psychic reach, now extending beyond simple layer of realspace or immaterium. He wanted to play with her for a time, instill dread into her to spice this juicy soul for better seasoning.

While Shemmeneash tried to wiggle out . . . planetary cover started to crack. Rubble and chunks of bedrock floated up in the air. Moment later, black clouds separated skies and void. In welter of enormous thunders, whole tectonic plate was being ripped apart, piece by piece, off the planet.

His darkness started to bleed into real world. I . . . became increasingly blacker, darker, until my whole self turned into smokey, human shaped nothingness. In moment, crust of the planet opened up in twitches of pain. Sunlight has been steadily cut off by local bubble of this dark energy until complete darkness fell over planet. As lightning storm remained all which illuminated remaining space. In spectacle of lights my mind became . . . light. Wonderful light filled my mind. Then, pain of forever loneliness, gazing into source of all creation, yet being pushed away into fringe of existence. The ecstasy of reconnection to creation, over trail of innumerable devoured souls. The filaments of creation. The understanding of eternity. The sight of destiny. One glance at dimensions below to see struggle and strife. The taste of misery. Taste of primordial energies of the star. Taste of light. Taste of darkness. One gaze into higher dimensions to know infinite bliss of unity.

For moment, I could gaze into whole creation. The realignment to our highest self. I felt millions of other dimensions twirling in ever dance of cosmic energies. I was in the past, now and the future. I was whatever was, is and ever will be. There was no yesterday, there was no tomorrow. Only eternal now. Eternal creation of infinite worlds. Lives that were and will come after. All dimensions, planes of existence, layers of creation, mechanics of manifestation . . . all at reach of my fingertips. Omnipotent and all knowing. I was the god creator, feeling infinite number of my other selves in infinite number of worlds. The law of existence. The breath of life. I was the fractalized unity of infinite number, a compartmentalized holographic part . . . and for one moment . . . his power became mine. As my mind retracted to real world, I felt the divine intervention within my veins. The infinite power coursing through my astral self. Through my physical self.

Snap of fingers to level mountains. Wave of my hand to level whole land. Mere thought of an action to open planet's core. A reach of a finger to drink from a star.



Discharges of putrid, necrotic lightning energies lighted up black clouds. After underground explosions spewed out lakes of magma, now floating up into sky. Visibility returned in at least small degree. By that time . . . we already manifested.

Winged cloud of darkness, shaped into somewhat humanoid shape, as big as mountain, stretching from bottoms of craters into stratosphere, held in it's black claws puny, little, insignificant creature of the warp trembling with fear. Wailing of lost souls reverberated in the air, as chains of black thorns engulfed surface, tearing rift between realities. In next few minutes, whole planet have been cut off from reality. Behold . . . True shape of the void dragon.

Shemmeneash screamed in unholy pain, being ripped apart piece by piece. Her presence faded. Physical flesh though intact, became last vestige of accursed torment, as Mag'ladroth consumed her soul slowly . . . delighting himself with every slurp and sip, until not even memory of her existence remained. In mere few moments all she ever was, has been erased. All her power, all her being, forever lost to time, till only memory withing me remained.

And so I had fulfilled the bargain. After Nerogoth's time ended, he turned his gaze over whole planet. Billions harvested already, but half more to go. With perverse scrutiny, he tormented remaining souls with void thorns, slicing and ripping and tearing each one, little by little with void hooks, rooting deep into their spirit, inflicting as much suffering as possible before they collapsed. In just few minutes whole planet has been eradicated of life. Even animals and plants and anything bearing spiritual essence. . . but this was not enough . . . he wanted more . . .

Moment later, Shogo cracked. Giant spikes carved planet apart. He was so hungry, he even devoured It's mass. All of it was just an appetizer before reaching its crystal core, hosting spirit of the planet. Multidimensional scream of pain reverberated in the eternity. Entity as venerable and wonderful as soul of planet was being consumed in sadistic torment. Another few minutes turned rocky giant into pile of pebble asteroids, but . . . wailing of planet's spirit was not enough. He had to have more . . . so he turned to the Nerolinia.

Blob of darkness floated across time-space, threading between dimensions. With ravenous hunger, black tentacles spread over surface, locking it in otherworldly bite. Like black hole, he begun to strip star from its outer shell, but in reality he consumed interdimensional gateway embedded within its electromagnetic furnace, the very multidimensional connection of stars between all layers of existence. I have no idea how long it was but . . . for me it seemed like just a . . . moment.

Before I knew, star waned into dwarf, shrinking in front of my astral sight, until last drop of its existence has been erased. It didn't even have time to collapse. Once he finally sated himself, my consciousness was able to fall into darkness.





— Arrival Day [169] — Pursuit day [153] — Day of reign [121] —

He wouldn't let me drift in the void. Least he himself be stranded in nothingness for eternity.

I woke up in corridor of a ship. My body badly damaged, burnt and crushed. Clothes almost melted with my skin. Peeling off parts of shirt felt like skinning myself. Moving my hands alone costed a lot of pain, to the point I could barely get up at all. Fibers in sore muscles roared with burnt heat.

Seemed like power was still on, though half of lights have been gone already. One end of corridor didn't have any light at all. Fortunately my eyes were intact and I could take a look around. Dead bodies everywhere. Guardsmen, voidsmen, sororitas, cultists, demons and myriad of other monsters stained floor, choking air with death and decay. Massive war left many holes in walls. I recognized Basket Of Thorns and its spine corridor, connecting whole length of the ship. Since I wasn't wearing much at all, I needed to find something to avoid freezing. Temperature dropped below comfortable human range. In act of desperation . . . I looted one of butchered nobles, or what was left of him, out of his coat and trousers. From dead soldier, boots, knife and krak grenade. Even that was heavy haul for me.

As I traveled towards our cabins, dead silence echoed in my head so much, I barely noticed my steps. Multitude of defensive positions overrun by warp creatures intermingled with bodies of defenders. My guess estimated at least few thousand dead crew already. Fight intensity seemed to increase with proximity to command center. At least backup generator was still running alright. On my way to top of the ship, I resupplied at canteen. Walking one mile took me about half an hour. Once I ate something, my regeneration capabilities reinvigorated in strength. After just hourly stop, my walking ability almost returned to usability and sheering pain stopped digesting me inside.

At distance of about half an hour to bridge, I heard running steps in next corridor. I wasn't in any state of fighting. Hiding would be my only option, but where. There were no near doors or even crates, just dead bodies. Before I could do anything, someone run out of corner. At first, without even thinking, I tried to run, but slipped on puddle of blood, landing on ground. Scream of that someone filled corridor in sound of terror. Gotta admit my body wasn't exactly a looker. More like a zombie.

When I finally managed to turn my head, Ada stood in middle of walkway, grasping her face in disbelief. She recognized me . . . even in this sorry state.

I . . . well . . . I wasn't all that happy to see her. In fact, it only made me suspicious. How in nine hells could she survive all alone on this ship in pristine condition, being chased by all sickness humankind could imagine. At first, I thought it could be a doppelganger, but it was her. The same soul I remembered from foundry.

She . . . dropped to knees in horror, gazing at what has become of me, to the point of crying. Gasping air. Once I got up, she somewhat put herself together, trying to cheer me, or perhaps herself, up. Knowing that I was real and still living brought her great joy. She was also aware all this damage would heal in no time. As glad as she was to see me, as repulsed to touch me. We didn't have time to chat



when bunch of crazed cultists closed up on us from all directions. Ada tried help me get up, to make me run away, but my legs couldn't move so fast. In hysterical screams, she begged me to move faster. When we heard them just around corner, I knew it was futile to run. Running or whatever it can be called, ended us up in some kind of storage room, in front of industrial lift. I told her to hunker down behind crates and readied to fight on my own. She didn't protest and found nice, black corner to hide. I did the same, choosing place behind crates at entrance. I wasn't going to move much, but my powers were still somewhat useful. Once they run in not noticing me, without playing around, I just froze all of them all at once, crushing their brains where they stood. It did the trick, but drained me of any energy I had left. Once again, my body dropped to the floor like potato bag. She dragged me to the lift and hit switch.

With few minutes of rest we had, she asked me what happened to me, to the planet and to the very star they saw being extinguished by black cloud of evil. With limited speech, all I could say, she should focus on here and now. Calling reinforcements and contacting Hakobyan was our priority. I asked in return what happened to the ship after my departure. She didn't even know what. After Lydia came back without me, captain revered my "sacrifice" with moment of silence. Janna didn't know what to do about whole situation and decided to fly outside gravity field of Shogo, waiting for my communication till the very end. Few moments later red alarm sirens sounded all over the ship. Something has boarded main storage bay. It wasn't until most soldiers died, she finally learnt about nature of cultists and their demons. All of them only thought it was just fantastic fairy tales from drunkards in sleazy bars. Taken by surprise, crew died by thousands in just under an hour. According to her, sisters put up a valiant fight, but after whole standard day, she was still hiding in panic room with many nobles. After they got out, some more "manly" men tried to provide security but . . . you can imagine how it ended. Ada managed to run away from psychos for hours.

We arrived to the top, officer quarters kitchen. Since my body already begun regeneration process, great hunger prompted me to eat some more. While I had some fruits, she started to whine about how cruel fate put us into such place. Another Lift coming down cut off our conversation. We run out of storage area into main corridor, trying to find our way to officer quarters. To instill in her some sense of hope, I talked about a plan to reach safe place. She cried there was no safe place. There was some truth to it, yet until I made situation clear, nothing could be certain. After moving far enough, we found dusty and murky storage room.

Upper platform of logistics warehouse was clear. Room looked intact and unused for long time. Schematics available on PDA from that noble guy indicated it was blank space. Fortunately, we found head bridge control room was just few crossroads ahead. Unfortunately, we heard sounds of skirmish. Loud yells of cultists, roars of demons and shooting. I used, actually instructed Ada how to use this PDA, to connect to ship sensors for tracking life forms. Whatever survived was still three levels below us, in officer day room, but moved up at fairly quick pace. Girl has lost all hope and almost broke in tears. Reminding her that control room had separate life support systems and blast shielding made her understood safety of such place.

Limping as fast as we could, towards head bridge, we tried to outrun whoever pursued us. Some paths were closed, some collapsed and we had to make



a detour, through officer leisure quarters. My senses started to pick up spirit signature of someone not far behind us. To avoid detection, we entered void viewing terrace and closed the door. I finally saw what remained of Shogo in far distance. Field of pebbles drifted through dark space, devoid even from sunlight. Plates still had leftovers of some kind of banquet. Few pieces of clothing remained on chairs next to tall window wall. I stood behind door frame, readying ambush had anyone enter after all. Ada turned off light. In haste searched for a place to hide between tables, sofas and dancing parquet.

Little by little, dull sound of stiletto steps came closer and closer. I thought it to be familiar. With whatever psychic strength I had left, I used my astral sights to spy on the person. Perhaps it was fear, perhaps bitterness, but what I saw felt like nail in the coffin. Kiera'leth . . .

Might as well be grim reaper closing on us.

A: No. He was already out. After the feast, Mag'ladroth receded into his own realm, laying dormant. Nothing could reach him. Not even serious or catastrophic danger to my existence. Our existence.

I couldn't understand why would she still hunt Ada after all losses Drukhari sustained. My guess placed dark Eldar little over half of operating capacity – not enough to perform any kind of attack, raid or even defense, much less a hunt for specific person. Due to dulled senses, I wasn't sure if she felt my presence in warp. Luckily, she passed by our room somewhere further.

I stepped to Ada and asked what would succubus want from her. She couldn't find an answer and fell into hysterical madness. As fast as she could, stood up and run to door, attempting to run in opposite direction, as far away as she could. No amount of calling to her senses was enough to make her not unlock door. Before I could reach her, she was already running out, and . . . immediately thrown in.

Kiera'leth laughed out loud, how pitifully weak her counterfeit turned out to be. Lightly bruised, Ada got herself off the floor, trying to run away to side chamber, but her . . . progenitor just jumped on her, pinning to the floor. Understanding nothing of Eldar language, she screamed for help, while succubus greeted me one again as morning star.

I pleaded to tell me why was she so extremely prejudiced against her. Seeing how defenseless we both were, she let her stiletto off Ada's back, who immediately tried to run through door. Wych unclenched blade whip wrapped around arm and threw it around clone's hips, biting into her flesh and then grabbing her throat with elbow clutch. Ada screamed in pain, when Kiera'leth told her “to lay down like a good bitch” in human speech. Even in such . . . dire circumstances, her voice was really wonderful. How fucked up is that . . .

Anyway, she then pulled out some kind of eldrich necklace out of her back pocket and put it tightly on Ada's neck. It didn't have any spikes. Contrary, it was divinely beautiful, golden collar, entwined with glamorous little spirit stones. I heard something like this was gifted to Eldar “bride” once her man decided to mate her for life.

I wasn't in any position to help. In fact, I was even more helpless than Ada.



Standing up was the best effort I could muster.

Kiera'leth came close to me, displaying her great disappointment in my state, but enormously intrigued by extent of my powers . . . so great as to crush a planet and extinguish a sun. Even their ships felt cascade of cosmic calamity. Then walked behind me, put elbows on my shoulders, grabbed my jaw and told to look at the filth on the floor, so I wouldn't miss a thing. Ada screamed time and time again to explain to her what was happening. To wych, she was little more than piece of furniture, not worthy of any attention. Or perhaps even less.

She yelled something, a word I didn't recognize into the ether, filling all halls around with loud, eldrich voice. While waiting for something, she proposed me to come with her, who could give me completion of my existence in every manner. She would fulfill my mind and body in ways no human could ever, commanding me to forget about the doll. She knew I not only killed army of demons, but killed a star itself. Commotion about it was so great, whole warp suddenly became still and sterile several light years around, receding in fear of me. She knew I was a helpless child at this moment, but aware my regeneration abilities would heal me in time.

I asked which haemonculi managed to create such wonderful clones of her. She didn't appreciate calling them “wonderful”, clenching gauntlet claws into my chin, but admitted that man named Reitziger almost delivered her what haemonculi couldn't, and if only I wouldn't appear, he would make her immortal. So now, I needed to take responsibility for my crimes . . . one way or the other.

Before she could end the sentence, black portal opened behind Ada. Dark, black nothingness in rectangular shape. Semi ethereal wraith, black blob of floating darkness with something like two hands wearing armored gloves, covered in tattered mantle, floated into room. I knew this presence. Another creature of the warp but unconnected to four major entities. The collectors of black tontine.

It sent message in our minds, asking if this is the bargain piece. Kiera'leth confirmed. Wraith came close, fear paralyzed Ada and probed her soul. I also felt this. It connected through warp in search of spirit patterns. Immediately, a whole net of succubus' clones appeared in front of me, each holding a piece of her soul. It also allowed me to see into contract of those two. She yelled not to watch and bit her claws deeper into my jaw, but it was too late. I already seen how this all started.

It put me almost 70 years back. Into day of their raid over secretive ship under sororitas banner, which hauled relics from site discovered at ILU-4. Lievishal, man we knew as SIN, tortured priest prisoner in charge of reliquary. Man begged to trade knowledge for mercy. He spoke of a way to immortalize soul through pacts with warp itself, to avoid thirst of Slaanesh. This sparked great interest within them. They searched for fools, who could help them realize it, and . . . they found Edmund, who claimed he already achieved immortality. In just one conversation, he convinced them to write a black tontine with wraiths of immaterium for immortality, signing with their own spirits. By creating clones, he could drop a piece of their souls into them and with supply big enough, cheat on tontine by providing faux souls. This way, they didn't need to worry about death or she who thirsts. Almost immediately, Edmund was given all he wanted to create such specimen, which took him almost 30 years to create first one. In meantime, they raided surrounding worlds to keep sector in constant turmoil,





allowing him to create society which overtook Mara, then subsector, without firing single shot, behind the scenes. It was only when I set out for ILU-2 Reitziger declared their plan was no more and dropped any connection. Samsara came to see Edmund to teach him a lesson, but found me instead. Since then, Kiria'leth hunted all remaining clones to extend deadline. A1 was the only remaining sacrificial clone. After this last trade she would extent deadline enough to find a substitute. Many question have been answered, but many still lied in dark. None of them knew anything about Shemmeneash or my true nature. Reitziger . . .what game did he really play? Well . . . HAHAAHAHAHAHA! The same as fucking always. For him . . . the game IS the purpose . . .

Once wraith came closer, grabbing Ada by arm and dragging her back into portal. Screams of helpless struggle and yells of help torn my soul in half. Being myself helpless to save anyone . . . I wished it was me being dragged instead of her. But before they took first step on the other side, laspistol shot pierced her head. Carcass dropped like stone, making Kiera'leth scream into heavens at whatever just happened. She immediately tried to run, but since contract was broken, there was no way to run. Wraith subdued her with some kind of powers, making her lump and immobilizing lower body. Her screams begging for help couldn't be stopped however. How could I have not sensed his presence just outside opened doors?

Well, the truth is . . . Let's . . . let's just finish.

As she screamed Reitziger's name, cursing it in every possible way her language allowed, his massive laughter derided her for all times. Wraith grabbed her neck with putrid, long and decaying hand, fully wrapping its fingers around throat. She tried to stab it, kick it, and wiggle out, but she couldn't even hit the ephemeral being. It existed outside time and space.

Seeing him right here, right now, infuriated me to no end. Sudden spike of power, invigorated by hatred, allowed me to stop whatever his plan was. This time, I reached in astral grip for collector, almost banishing it back without taking anyone, but . . . Reitziger was prepared. One shot pierced through my elbow, second through knee, dropping me to the ground, but this time completely drained and barely conscious. I had troubles looking at Kiria'leth on her way to hell. After yet another moment of unholy screams, echo from portal subsided, closing rift in reality. I know how it will sound like, but . . . I preferred her screams more than his laughter.

Laying on the floor, sour and half dead. I didn't even have strength to turn over to see him. After few, good laughs more, he calmed down. I heard he walked towards me. At this time, only the worst things raced through my mind. He fucked over everyone till the very end . . . What would he do with me . . .



A: Afraid? No. It was more like . . . I gave up and just waited . . . for whatever he would do to me.

A: What you can't imagine is hole in my heart. In my soul! . . . I wanted to move, but I couldn't. I wanted to breathe, but I couldn't . . . I wanted to scream but I couldn't . . . I wanted to cry, but I couldn't. I wanted to die but I couldn't. . . Terrible acid grip in my chest digested my soul much worse than any bodily pain ever could. Black hole within me sucked out all remaining life . . . Not even a depression but bottomless chasm eroded whatever remained in my heart . . . I wondered if that was the feeling when Father saw what became of Horus on Vengeful Spirit . . . There is no fighting with fist what worms in your heart The terrible feeling of total loss. The world still turns around, but . . . yours is completely gone. Devastated. Profaned.

With meticulous ease, he planned everything to the last letter. To the last moment, when this whole . . . thing came to an end.

Standing over me, grinning his teeth in maniacal smile from ear to ear, almost surreal, still pointing gun at me, commended me for my part. After yet another moment of hellish laughter, lowered and put pistol into his labcoat's pocket. We stared on each other for moment, until he decided to let me go easy, praising and thanking me for being such wonderful piece on the chessboard. Glorifying my person in radiant, opulent, posh and decorative exaltations of my existence. He thanked me for coming through with his plan so perfectly, and shed a tear for how well I executed everything he set me out to do. Boasted that no man in history of galaxy had such amazing servant. In gesture of appreciation he . . . told me he will at least let me know why it all happened. Firstly asked if I knew anything about planet Shogo. Of course, I didn't and he didn't even wait for any response of mine anyway. At this point, I couldn't even speak a word, barely conscious. Apparently hive world Shogo was built over vast systems of Necron Tombs. For 6 000 years humans lived 200 miles above ancient lords of galaxy without ever realizing there was already someone in caverns beneath inner crust. To Edmund, human presence didn't matter. Or Necron. Most important was amount of blackstone used in construction. Like at Cadia, and its noctilith pillars, planet wide network of such warp inhibitor hampered bleeding of immaterium to this part of galaxy. Mara had great temples of Blackstone lying in depths of planetary crust as well. He wondered how Mag'ladroth tasted what remained of his Necrontyr, laughing his ass out once again. After stopping, he admitted such full and perfect victory wasn't possible without me . . . Just like at every other planet we wasted into oblivion, for every time I erased another major warp creature . . . Since the very inception of my being. Helping him to destroy warp inhibition points throughout galaxy.

Then all of a sudden, like cut with a knife, his face turned all serious and menacing. For all help I lent him throughout millennia, he would let me know how it was possible to do everything, know everything, achieve everything . . .

Slowly, but surely, he put his hand under lab coat over his chest and then . . . slowly pulled out thick, silver necklace bound to big sigil of Tzeentch. As he smiled for last time, his form begun to turn ephemeral. Whole body turned to ashen mist field resembling human, just two times bigger. Necklace dropped right in front of my face. Dark, purple nebula built of thousand eyes looking like stars begun to blur edge of realities. Thousand mouths, speaking ethereal words in



unicen praises about my power. It . . . congratulated me for my performance, and thanked for denying another 48 billion souls to both Slaanesh or Shemmeneash.

Cold fear spiked through me, when I felt this power flooding reality around. Never before did I feel such undiluted, raw, primordial power. Power in its greatest, most pure meaning. Cloud of darkness and shimmering lights of thousand eyes spoke in choir of thousand voices that it would happy to provide me enough knowledge to figure it out on my own, retreating into immaterium, dissolving its presence like smoke in water. But before it vanished, I was assured to be taken care of . . . because he still had use for me . . . A “small consolation price after all my effort”. Such was his revelation to me.

You can't even imagine disappointment I felt. He tricked me. Used this connection between me and Emperor to instill false impressions in my head for thousands of years. One thing I never could imagine was my Father's plan crumbling down. Or me . . . giving a hand in . . . fucking over this world. Unwilling or not. Unknowing or not. That was a despair I could never forget.

This feeling . . . of devoid of emotions. Absolute clusterfuck of a calamity . . .

My consciousness drifted away not a moment after he disappeared.

Then, I woke up in apothecarium of Blackletter . . .

“Guarded” by four Paladins . . .

And the rest . . . you already know . . .

— End of Transcript —



